

BIBLICAL PREACHING IN AN AGE OF MISSION

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To my wife, Regine, my truest and best friend, my most helpful and trustworthy critic, whose dream, steadfastness, encouragement, help, patience, and faith have made this project a reality.

To the Church and Her faithful preachers: past, present, and future.

And above all this project is dedicated

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

During the last quarter of the twentieth century churches and pastors in North America were encouraged to learn from and use marketing techniques learned from the world of business. Combining these techniques with the theory of Church Growth originated by Donald McGavran and publicized by many of his followers, the Church developed ideas of preaching to specific niche audiences and demographic groups. In recent years there has been considerable conversation about what it means to be missional. This thesis-project shows that the Bible presents a model of preaching that is appropriate and sufficient to every age and culture. Every age is an Age of Mission and truly Biblical preaching will be missional preaching.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEXT AND THE PROBLEM FACING THE PREACHER

### Introduction

The Church has its marching orders. In a world of rapid and constant change this is one thing that has not changed and will not change. For the Church, the followers of Jesus Christ the kingdom and gospel imperative of our Lord has not changed. We first encounter this imperative in the last words of Jesus recorded by the evangelist Matthew (28:18, 19) and then again in each of the other three gospels in slightly different forms (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47 and John 20:21). This imperative is so important that Luke begins his history of the ongoing work of Jesus by His Spirit through and in the Church with the repeated words “and you shall be my witnesses...to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) We call this imperative the Great Commission. A. Boyd Luter calls it “Christ’s marching orders to the church.”<sup>1</sup> These marching orders have historically been such a part of the psyche of the followers of Jesus that Princeton historian Bernard Lewis defines Christianity as a “missionary religion whose followers believed that they were the possessors of God’s final revelation, which...was their sacred duty to bring to all mankind.”<sup>2</sup> These orders remain the same even today. The followers of Jesus are to take the good news of His Kingdom into all the world (Acts 1:8). We know the imperative has not changed

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<sup>1</sup> A. Boyd Luter, “Inspired Preaching in the New Testament: An Introductory Look,” C. Richard Wells and A. Boyd Luter, *Inspired Preaching: A Survey of Preaching Found in the New Testament*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East, a Brief History of the Last 2000 Years*, (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 32.



because the Church is still on earth, the King has not returned, and nowhere and at no time has our Lord lifted His imperative.

It is important for the Church to know what has not changed, because it lives in a world being described by social commentators as a world that is undergoing massive and seismic cultural changes. Communication, travel, globalization, technology, terrorism, dire warnings of global warming, and new pandemic diseases are all signs of the changes in our world. These changes impact us in a variety of ways and are changing the way we encounter, perceive, and interpret our world. Some who speak of these great changes also suggest that the Church must change its priorities, methods, and even its message in order to reach this new world. As the values and priorities of the culture change, the Church is being called to adapt its message both to reflect and to meet the challenge of these changes. It has become popular for many to subsume the bulk of cultural change under the broad title of Post-modernism<sup>3</sup>. This cultural designation is encountered in almost every context. Pundits, theologians, vocational and armchair philosophers, liberals and conservatives, progressives and staunch traditionalists, academics and pew-sitters know and use the term as a place to lay blame for what is wrong in our world, or to encourage an optimistic look at the future. Some in the Church see Postmodernism as the biggest of bogeymen, while others welcome it as the key that will unlock the prison doors that have kept the faithful from fulfilling their task in this age. It is neither.

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<sup>3</sup> Postmodern and Postmodernity will be capitalized when used as a proper noun to describe an era, it will be spelled with lower case when used as an adjective unless in a quote and then the original author's usage will be followed. The same rule will be followed with Modernity, Enlightenment, and Pagan(ism).

Postmodernism cannot be given that much importance. For one reason, the term itself is almost impossible to define, and its adherents and promoters are equally impossible to categorize. J. I. Packer, for example, says, “the only agreed upon element [about postmodernism] is that postmodernism is a negation of modernism.”<sup>4</sup> The difficulty in achieving an acceptable and universal definition for postmodernity is in part due to the fact that what passes for the postmodern outlook or postmodern condition “comes in all kinds of shapes and sizes.... Its own ethos almost guarantees that there will be no such thing as *a* postmodern outlook but rather there will be many different postmodern perspectives.”<sup>5</sup> Because the term is used in so many contexts, no one context can claim precedence over the others, and the term “cannot help but become a casualty of the fragmented world it seeks to describe!”<sup>6</sup>

A second reason why we cannot afford to focus exclusively on postmodernism as the most significant change in the cultural atmosphere is that it is not the only “post” in our cultural mailbox. As early as 1968, Francis Schaeffer described these changes in both popular and intellectual worldviews, telling an

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 26. David Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs, Christ in a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), says, of the use of the term post-modern/postmodernism, “It has already popped up in some American newspapers. And publishers have reflected this with books like *Women and Postmodernity*, *The Postmodern Bible Reader*, *The Postmodern God*, and *Postmodern Youth Ministry*. As news spreads of our postmodern condition, as the word slips into ever wider and ever more promiscuous usage, as more and more people seem to think they know what it is, definitional clarity becomes the most obvious victim. There is irony to this, of course, since definitional clarity is something that was prized in modernity, with its Enlightenment rationality, and is not so prized in Postmodernity. Indeed, it is often reviled as being simply the tool of those who want to exercise power over others. In a strange way, it is the postmodern ethos which is helping to obscure its own nature.” 61; and “There is no question that postmodern thought has been hatched rather self-consciously in opposition to Enlightenment ideology.... This postmodern outlook comes in all kinds of shapes and expressions which is what probably explains the multiplicity of definitions which have been advanced. 62, 67 Carl Raschke, *The Next reformation, Why Evangelicals must Embrace Postmodernity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 18, writes that postmodernism is a reaction against the rationalism of modernity—no broader definition.

<sup>5</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We do Ministry*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2000), 23.

audience at Wheaton College, “We live in a Post-Christian world.”<sup>7</sup> John Howard Yoder predated Schaeffer by nearly a decade when he wrote of our era both as post-Christian and Post-Constantian.<sup>8</sup> “That the ‘Constantian era’ is coming to an end has become one of the commonplaces of European social analysis.” Yoder went on to say that a similar end was to be anticipated for North America, and on both continents, “[t]he assumption that we live in a Christian World no longer holds.”<sup>9</sup> Rodney Clapp follows Yoder’s analysis calling the present era in the West both post-Constantinian and “a dying Christendom.”<sup>10</sup> Others like Stuart Murray have described the religious cultural setting of the West as “Post-Christendom.”<sup>11</sup> Yale theologians George Lindbeck and Hans Frei are echoed by William Willimon and Stanley Hauwerwas in calling for a Post-liberalism approach to understanding God and Scripture in the West.<sup>12</sup> Brian McLaren wraps up his summary of Postmodernism as a contrast to modernism saying, “In the postmodern world, we become post-conquest, post-mechanistic, post-analytical, post-secular, post-objective, post-critical, post-organizational, post-individualistic, post-Protestant, and

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<sup>7</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1969), 11 “However, as we will see this term might better be avoided today since it seems to assume that Europe and North America [or Christendom] was indeed Christian! As Stuart Murray points out in *Post-Christendom, Church and Mission in a Strange New World*, (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004) “...persistent voices throughout previous centuries queried whether Christendom was as Christian as was generally believed and suggested its Christianity was little more than veneer.” 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> There are two words used by authors quoted in this paper to describe the same cultural issue. Yoder uses “Constantian” and others use “Constantinian.” Unless used otherwise by the author quoted this paper will use the term Constantinian to describe the Church-State marriage birthed with the Edict of Milan and experienced in Europe and the colonies during Christendom.

<sup>9</sup> John Howard Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” *The Royal Priesthood, Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 53-64. While Yoder prefers the term and spelling Constantian, I will follow other authors who use *Constantinian* such as Rodney Clapp.

<sup>10</sup> Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People, the Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom, Church and Mission in a Strange New World*, (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> See Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth, The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 119-162.

post-consumerist.”<sup>13</sup> David Wells writes of our culture’s need “always to be post: we feel compelled to assure ourselves that we are *post*-Puritan, *post*-Christian, and *post*-modern. Our world is *post*-industrial and *post*-business. Our time is *post*-Vietnam, *post*-Watergate, and *post*-Cold War.”<sup>14</sup> For this reason, Wells chooses to refer to the present age of posts simply as “Our Time.”<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary philosophers speak of having entered a period they are calling post-foundationalism,<sup>16</sup> and the study of biblical hermeneutics is moving into a post-critical era.<sup>17</sup> In *Reclaiming the Center*, Justin Taylor sets forth a definition for what he and fellow editors Millard Erickson and Paul Kjoss Helseth call “postconservative” evangelicals, a movement others have variously called “postfundamentalist, postfoundationalist, postpropositionalist and postevangelical.”<sup>18</sup>

We live in a time of change that seems to defy definition. Craig Van Gelder attempts to sort through what he calls “post-ness,” saying that what is certain is that “the cultural landscape we occupy in the West in the latter part of the twentieth century has fundamentally shifted” and “it should be noted that the use of the prefix *post* points to the fact that we are not fully clear about the direction in which this

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<sup>13</sup> Brian D. MacLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 8.

<sup>14</sup> David Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 59-60.

<sup>15</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, ed., *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Craig Van Gelder, “Defining the Center—Finding the Boundaries: The Challenge of Re-Visioning the Church in North America for the twenty-First Century,” *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 26-52.

<sup>18</sup> Justin Taylor, “An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of this Book,” *Reclaiming the Center, Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, Millard Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth and Justin Taylor, ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 17-18.

cultural shift is moving or what its future shape will be.”<sup>19</sup> Before they are even properly defined, the future demise of these posts is already referred to as “past” when James Parker III writes “A Requiem for Postmodernism”<sup>20</sup> and Millard Erickson writes of the “transition to postpostmodernism (*sic*).”<sup>21</sup>

For the Church in the West, and North America in particular, the name by which the cultural sea change is called is neither the largest nor the most important issue on the ecclesiastical horizon or in our own front yard. This “post” culture of the West is actually an amalgamation of many changes that have been occurring in our society over several decades and have now come together to challenge the church’s identity, confidence, and understanding of its task. The most important issue for the Church in Western Europe and North America is the realization that it has been moved outside of the protective walls of a culture that understands, embraces, accepts, endorses, sponsors, and protects the Christian worldview. Today the culture of the West barely tolerates the Christian worldview. The Christian Church is no longer given privileged status as the gatekeepers, definers, and caregivers to the culture.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the church now lives and functions in a world that has been swept clean of the protective framework it once enjoyed and took for granted. The Church’s voice is no longer heard from pulpits safely protected with a sense of cultural entitlement, acceptance, or respect. Only when the Church realizes and accepts this new contextual reality can it begin to consider the real issue it faces:

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<sup>19</sup> Craig Van Gelder “Mission in the Emerging Postmodern Condition,” Hunsberger and Gelder, *Church Between Gospel and Culture*, 113, 114.

<sup>20</sup> James Parker III, “A Requiem for Postmodernism—Whither Now?”, Erickson, Helseth and Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center*, 307-321.

<sup>21</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences, the Promise & Perils of Postmodernism*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 306-328.

<sup>22</sup> Craig Van Gelder, “Defining the Center,” 41.

how to communicate the gospel into this new setting. To use the phrase we started with, how does the Church carry out its unchanged marching orders as it crosses the border into a new cultural reality?

Loren Mead's small monograph, *The Once and Future Church*<sup>23</sup> shows that the Western Church (Europe and North America) may no longer be conceived of as functioning within the safe confines of Christendom. Instead, the Church has seen the conceptual world of Christendom shrink until the walls of any given church now define the boundaries of its mission frontier. Kenyon Callahan refers to our time in the history of the Church's life as the Age of Mission.<sup>24</sup> Mead contends that the Church finds itself today in a world that is closer and more similar to the world of the New Testament apostles than any time since the end of that era. It is a world that David Wells describes as a "cauldron of conflicting religious claims."<sup>25</sup> Peter Jones has shown conclusively that the new religiosity in the West is nothing less than the same old paganism found in the pages of the Bible.<sup>26</sup> The issue for us is not that we have moved into some new worldview known as post-modernism (or post-anything-else-ism) but that all of the "posts" we are facing are parts of a greater whole of a new, challenging, and extremely exciting mission field. The mission field before the Church is no longer a world peopled by unknown *someones* living *over there*, but

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<sup>23</sup> Loren B. Mead, *The Once and Future Church*, (New York: The Alban Institute, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Kenyon Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership, Building on the Twelve Keys*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) "the day of the professional minister is over. The day of the missionary pastor has come... The day of the church culture is over. The day of the mission field has come... The day of the local church is over. The day of the mission outpost has come." 3, 13, 21, 22, See also Kenyon Callahan, *Visiting in an Age of Mission*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1994), *Preaching Grace*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), "Welcome to an Age of Mission." 6.

<sup>25</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 104.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Jones, *Capturing the Pagan Mind, Paul's Blueprint for Thinking and Living in the New Global Culture*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003).

inhabited by us, our family members, neighbors, co-workers, school teachers, and politicians right here, right outside the doors of the local church.<sup>27</sup>

Understanding postmodernism and the plethora of posts that comes with it are important, not as the major cultural issue facing the Church, but as descriptors and pointers to a changing cultural landscape that is an emerging, growing, and challenging mission field in its own right. The larger issue is really the fact that the Church faces an intellectual culture that is no longer living and thinking in overt and conscious rejection of Christianity as it did in the recent era of the Enlightenment project.<sup>28</sup> The population of the new world is apathetic to the claims of Christianity, preferring to follow its own gods and goddesses and the priests, priestesses, shamans and gurus that represent those deities. Of course, this apathy toward Christianity often quickly changes to antipathy when people are confronted with the truth-claims of Christianity, truth-claims that they see as the outmoded, intolerant, and repressive message of a bygone day. The reaction then often becomes open hostility and aggressive rejection. Even so, this hostility may not be against Christianity, *per se*, but against its necessary exclusivity and inherent intolerance for competing truth-claims.

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<sup>27</sup> George Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America," Hunsberger and Van Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, 3, tells how the U.S. delegates at Lausanne II, the 1989 gathering of evangelical missionary forces in Manila met as delegates from other countries did to 'pray, evaluate, share, and strategize regarding the evangelizing task facing the church. The significant difference between the U.S. delegates those from other nations is that every other set of delegates spoke of the missionary task facing their own country. "The meetings of the U.S. delegates were noteworthy because their focus was not on evangelizing their country [the United States] but on continuing to mobilize churches in the United States for evangelizing the other countries of the world. The U.S. participants did not see their country as a field for mission, but only as a launching pad for missionizing the 'elsewheres' of the world.

<sup>28</sup> This is term preferred by Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

## **The Goal of this Paper**

The goal of this paper is to offer a Biblical framework for preaching in this present Age of Mission that can be equally applied in every age. More specifically, the goal is to present a method of preaching that can truly be called Biblical Preaching, because it is firmly based on the method and example of the missional preaching of the New Testament, is true and consistent with the message of the missional preaching of the New Testament, and seeks to fulfill the marching orders given to the church in every age of mission it has faced and will face. I want to show that we can and must preach in our context as missional preachers, not only holding firmly to and contending for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3), but also using a methodology that is equally as firmly based on the Bible.

No longer can we think of mission as something that is done by others, to persons unknown, over there. We must now awaken to the opportunities of doing mission ourselves among our neighbors near and now. Since our setting and the audience in that setting have changed, and since the message we bring does not and cannot change, we might well ask if the preacher can preach missionally with continuing integrity and fidelity to the Bible. This paper uses term Age of Mission because it does not require us to look back at any specific previous era from a “post” position, and therefore is not by necessity defined by what has preceded it, regardless of the geographical, intellectual, cultural, or philosophical setting. The temptation is to name the past and to speak of the new or future setting by use of the prefix *post*. Because *post* words are backward facing, they are less than helpful in charting the future that is still unknown cultural territory. Using the term Age of Mission allows



us to speak to every new age and is meant to look positively and optimistically into the future as Biblical preachers.

This question of communicating the Gospel in a new age is of paramount importance. The contention of many is that as the landscape of the mission frontier changes and moves ever closer to home, the Church's missional methods will need to reflect those changes. For example, Loren Mead's basic premise in *The Once and Future Church* is that the Church can neither keep doing the same things in the same old ways and expect new, better, or even the same results that it has seen in the past, nor can it desperately hold on to the comfortable and familiar past until things get better.<sup>29</sup> The Church cannot waver between the old and the new, wanting to stay where it is comfortable, using tools and weapons of engagement that are familiar, while seeking to launch into new territories using the latest, greatest ideas of the pundits and experts, without considering whether the Bible speaks to these methodologies.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, the Church cannot merely take the old weapons and fly onto a battle field that has changed so significantly that the battle is lost before it begins. Craig Van Gelder warns: "The church needs to be careful that it does not hang on to obsolete categories or fight enemies that no longer exist."<sup>31</sup> Neither can the Church be passive in the face of changes. John Howard Yoder surveys the Church's history of accepting the *status quo* and its changes into new *status quos* as the will of God,

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<sup>29</sup> Mead, *The Once and Future Church*, 4-7.

<sup>30</sup> David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant, Truth-lovers, Marketers, and the Emergents in the Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), and Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Hourglass Books, 1993, offer warnings against uncritical use of technology and methodology.

<sup>31</sup> Van Gelder, "Mission in the Emerging Postmodern Condition," 116.

and he hopes that "...we have learned to ask if it can really be the will of the Lord of history that his church should be limping after history, always attempting to adapt to a new situation that it assumes to be providential, *always a half-step behind in the effort to conform instead of making history* (emphasis mine).<sup>32</sup> Thomas Oden calls this constant catch-up process "the faddism of theology" and says that "no other discipline has devoted so much energy" to leave its base-line [the study of God] as it "tries to keep pace with every new ripple in the theological river."<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand the church cannot spend its time trying to attain, an expertise about what might seem to be the 'next cultural wave' (politically, psychologically, artistically, or philosophically). After the emergent movement is spotted on the crest of a distant wave, we try to find some small foothold for the Christian faith on the rolling curl of the wave. As the torrent flows by, we then look for another emerging swell. Thus we have been washed and dumped by several swirling currents.... Hell for the modern theologian, according to this view, is the prospect of being detached from the intellectual momentum of our times.<sup>34</sup>

Martin Luther challenged the Church to be the Church, but the Church cannot be the Church unless it continually understands that its missional character can never change and its preaching must always be a good word of hope to a people who live on its frontiers, wherever those frontiers may be. As Craig Van Gelder reminds us, the apostolic nature of the church makes it "missionary in nature....The very

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<sup>32</sup> John Howard Yoder, "The Otherness of the Church," 55; Gene Edward Veith, "Catechesis, Preaching, and Vocation," in *Here We Stand: A Call from Confessing Evangelicals*, James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse, ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), "Instead of naively following the trends or playing or constantly playing catch-up to the unbelievers, Christians might well start setting some trends of their own. Historically, Christianity has always influenced the culture. From the abolition of infanticide and death-sports in the Roman Empire to the mitigation of political tyranny and the promotion of universal education in more recent centuries, the church—without confusing its sphere with that of the state—has been a leaving influence in every culture in which its presence has been known." 77-96.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas C. Oden, "On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age," Os Guinness and John Seel, ed., *No God But God*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 189-203.

<sup>34</sup> Oden, "On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age," 195-196.

existence of the church in the world creates a missionary condition. All that the church does...is missionary by intent.”<sup>35</sup>

### **The Apostolic Paradigm**

Loren Mead describes this changing world as a new cultural paradigm that is being forced upon the Church. He says this is the third paradigm of cultural environment that the Church has faced during its history. Mead’s designation of the two eras preceding the “once and future church” are the Apostolic Paradigm and the Christendom Paradigm. He does not give a name to the third reality, but for the purposes of this paper, Callahan’s term “the Age of Mission” will be used to describe the church’s current *sitz en lieben*. The Church in the Age of Mission must return to an understanding and out-living of its missionary and missional character.

Preaching, therefore, in order to be Biblical must also be missional, and in order for preaching to be truly missional it must be Biblical.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 125. See also Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 41. “The Spirit led church’s very existence in the world has to be understood in missionary terms. The church cannot help but participate in God’s mission in the world. This is part of what it means to be the Church to do less would be contrary to its nature. While we find that the church in its history has at times not fully understood, or lived out of this reality, the Spirit’s presence in the church means that this reality is always there to be cultivated and lived into.”

<sup>36</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text, Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 113-119 “Biblical preaching is preaching that uses the Bible as its source, its authority, and its interpretation, and the standard for application of the preaching to the lives of both the preacher and the listener. This means that Biblical preaching allows the Bible to control the message, is true to the whole counsel of Scripture and most importantly shows God as the main character of the text. God is not only the subject of the subject of the Scripture his works and deeds are displayed so that the reader of the Bible might come to know Him as he interprets himself to us. “The primary interest of the Biblical authors is God’s action in human vents, not the events themselves.” The Bible contains what “God intends to tell us about *himself*: his person, his actions, his will, etc. Hence one of the most important questions we can ask in interpreting a passage is, What does this tell us about God and his coming kingdom? ... Everything in the Bible “reveals its theocentric nature. Everything is viewed in relationship to God: the world is God’s creation; human beings are image-bearers of God; salvation belongs to God—in short, all of life belongs to and is governed by God. Biblical preaching will not stop with telling what the passage proclaims about God and his deeds until those deeds point to and exalt the mightiest of God’s mighty acts: the full work of “Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament history, promises, and

The Apostolic Paradigm lasted from the birth of the church until the Edict of Milan in AD 313. In this paradigm the church was small, misunderstood, opposed, illegal, resisted, satirized, marginalized, and persecuted. Each local congregation was made up of dedicated and committed believers who saw their life over against and in contradistinction to the world and culture around it. This world surrounded the church, both figuratively and literally. The church was born into a culture where both public and private life was dominated by the religion and rituals of a vast array of deities. The indigenous Roman deities had been augmented and joined by those brought from the nations she had conquered. Rome was quick and quite willing to assimilate the gods of these nations and added the distinctives of their worship to the traditional worship of the Roman *cultus*—including emperor worship. Robert Wilken writes,

The sheer exuberance and prodigality of religious practice never fails to impress anyone who has looked at the thousands of inscriptions that document life in the ancient world...Simply on the basis of coins minted for [the city of] Nicomedia in western Asia Minor, we know of more than forty deities that were worshipped

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prophecies....Using this definition does not require that a distinction is made between topical, textual or expository preaching. They each one can fulfill the definition or fall sadly short of it.” Haddon Robinson, “The High Call of Preaching,” *The Art and Craft of Preaching, A Comprehensive Resources for Today’s Communicator*, Haddon Robinson and Craig Bruce Larson, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), Reminds us that, “*The Bible is a book about God*. It is not a religious book of advice about the ‘answers’ we need about a happy marriage, sex, work, or losing weight. Although the Scriptures reflect on many of those issues, are above all about who God is and what God thinks and wills. I understand reality only if I have an appreciation for who he is and what he desires for his creation and from his creation.” 23-24; Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching, The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980) opens with “This is a book about expository preaching...” and without further delineation makes his definition of expository preaching the definition of Biblical Preaching, “*Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of the passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his listeners.*” (italics in original) 15, 21. For the purposes of this paper the definition of Biblical Preaching will depend more on the Theocentric and Christocentric redemptive nature of the Biblical narrative than any definition that does not. More definitions will be given in chapter two.

there. By the reckoning of the ancients there were more than thirty thousand gods...<sup>37</sup>

Inclusion and benign tolerance of this multifaceted religious expression was the spirit of the age. Paul's Athens experience in Acts 19 was not in a unique religious setting. Peter Jones tells us that "Religious tolerance was a fact of life in the Greco-Roman world...everywhere in the ancient empire the altars and cults flourished side by side, with much interchangeability."<sup>38</sup> The world that confronted the birth of Christianity was a religious utopia with an "almost complete absence of [religious] intolerance."<sup>39</sup> The exception to this attitude of tolerance was the demand for uniformity in worship and allegiance to the emperor. To refuse this worship was both an act of religious defiance and an act of treason and sedition.

While there was apparently room for the worship of thousands of deities in the Roman world during the Apostolic Paradigm, there was no place for those who refused to honor the Roman concept of *pietas*: "the loyalty and obedience to the customs and traditions of Rome, to the inherited laws, and to those who lived in previous generations." The term also included "reverence and devotion to the gods and to the ritual or cultic acts by which the gods were honored."<sup>40</sup> To be *impious* was to be antisocial. In religious and cultural terms, Christians found themselves untolerated not because they worshipped a "foreign" or "false" god, but because they refused to live as *pious* Romans. In terms of citizenship, those who refused to make

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<sup>37</sup> Robert L. Wilken, "Religious Pluralism and Early Christian Theology" *Interpretation* 44, (1988), 379-391.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, *Capturing the Pagan Mind*, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, *Capturing the Pagan Mind*, For more on the Religious context of the first-century Roman Empire see Charles Bigg, *The Church's Task under the Roman Empire*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1905), 32-127; Jérôme Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 121-140.

<sup>40</sup> Robert L. Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2d ed. 2003), 56.

the confession required of every loyal Roman citizen that “Caesar is Lord” found themselves under the condemning opprobrium of “atheists, anarchists and disturbers of the peace.”<sup>41</sup> When the religion of Jesus came to tolerant and syncretistic Rome<sup>42</sup>, Rome showed that its vaunted religious flexibility and inclusiveness could be stretched only so far. It could not be open enough to accept an insistence that there are not many ways, but only one way, the way of the One Jesus.

In addition, when Christians proclaimed their message of One Way, One Lord and One Morality—or even merely lived out the implications of this message in their daily lives—they were met with suspicion, misunderstanding, resistance, and violent opposition. The Christians did not only give fealty and reverence to only one God, but they sought to live in obedience to the canon of His moral and ethical demands. The New Testament shows this rejection by the Jewish community in Palestine, the Hellenized Diaspora Jewry, and the Gentile world.<sup>43</sup> This opposition was neither constant nor steady but came in waves of varying intensity right and continuing even

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<sup>41</sup> Jones, *Capturing the Pagan Mind*, writes that the tolerance of Rome was a combination of the geo-political reality and necessity of religious conformity, totalitarian imposition, and a growing syncretism of polytheism, mystery religions. The religious *Pax Romna* “was tolerance only if one conformed to the religious/political powers that ruled... The political forces in power were just as ‘exclusive, intolerant and narrow-minded as the much maligned fundamentalists, ancient or modern.’” 32.

<sup>42</sup> See Charles Bigg, *The Church’s Task in the Roman Empire*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1905), 61-61.

<sup>43</sup> The early Christians were viciously accused of the worst sorts of crimes. Even Cornelius Fronto, tutor to the enlightened Marcus Aurelius, and himself described as ‘kindly and reasonable man’ slandered the Christians as being a “sect that fled the light and conspired in the shadows. Their common feasts included the drinking of blood that had been heated, followed by sexual orgies.... The charges of ‘atheism,’ ‘Oedipean intercourse’ (incest) and ‘Thyestean feasts’ (cannibalism) all carried suggestion of conspiracy and black magic enacted under the guise of religion. The explosion came under the reign of Marcus Aurelius. First in Asia and then among the isolated Christians in Gaul, Christians became the object of terrible outbursts by the populace, which the authorities were unable or unwilling to control.” W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 181.

after the Edict of Milan.<sup>44</sup> Even so, the community of believers in the Apostolic Paradigm understood very well, and accepted fully, their master's definition of who they were as well as their responsibility to live out that definition. At one and the same time they were to be a chosen people, a people called *out* of darkness and into light, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests (I Peter 2:9-10), a people engaged in the world without living according to the standards and mores of that world or, as the Scripture says, "in the world, but not of the world" (see John 17:11; Rom. 12:1, 2; I John 2:15).

Living as citizens of the heavenly kingdom is to take risks, to stand out, to be seen as different from the prevailing culture. Living according to the call of Christ is to live without an eye toward personal safety and comfort. Jesus described this kind of living as taking up the cross. This kind of living invites the mockery, derision, and hatred of the world even today. Jesus warned that his followers should be wary when the world speaks well of them. Jesus told his disciples that they were to be his witnesses. A witness is, of course, one who tells what he has seen, heard, and experienced. However, the world into which the first witnesses "went and told" gave the word an additional new meaning. A witness, or *martus* was no longer merely someone who told, but told by dying, often the worst and the most ignoble kinds of death known.

When this community of witnesses and martyrs considered their call to go into the world and their call to be faithful disciples, they saw a clear-cut engagement

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<sup>44</sup> Laurie Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity, A Topical Study of Its Life, Beliefs & Practices*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 117 "Prior to Constantine, Christianity had no secure place in society or in the law. Tolerated at best, faced with pogroms and state execution at worst, the standing of Christian's had been precarious for nearly three centuries."

between those who were on the “inside” and those who were coming from the “outside.” The boundaries of the mission field were clear and easy to define. The mission field was right outside the door and walls of the church’s meeting place, or among everyone who was not an express member of the community of faith. To be in or go into the world as a Christian was to engage with a hostile world; to come into the community of the Church from that world was a “dramatic and powerful event.”<sup>45</sup> In the public act of initiation and inclusion into the community of believers, the baptized “person dramatized a symbolic death to the things of the world and a new birth into the way of the cross.”<sup>46</sup> But along side this spiritual reality, it was an entry into a community that was continually under the threat of persecution, even unto death.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Mead, *Once and Future Church*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Mead, *Once and Future Church*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 16ff gives an example of this kind of deadly intolerance against Christians as seen in the letters of Pliny (The Younger) to the emperor Trajan. Pliny assumed the position of governor of the province of Bithynia in the autumn of AD 111 and shortly thereafter found reason to write to the emperor with requests for permission to be granted to citizens in two separate cities to form non-political associations, or in his word, *hetaerias* or “clubs.” Although these requests were for an association of fire-fighters and a “benefit society,” Pliny sought the emperor’s personal permission before giving his own official sanction. The reason for Pliny’s caution was that both of these kinds of associations had in the past morphed into political clubs that had caused disruption and trouble for the central Roman government. He suggests that Pliny’s subsequent correspondence to Trajan asking for advice on dealing with Christians should be seen in light of Trajan’s concern for peace and tranquility in the empire and keeping that tranquility through the suppression and limitation of any group that might become the seed bed for grumbling, unrest, sedition, or political uprising. It is no surprise that Pliny frames his question about Christians in terms of possible community unrest due to the over supply of sacrificial meat for sale in the market place. It seems that the Christians were refusing to buy such meat and the imbalance of supply and demand threatened the stability of the local economy. Pliny also “knew that on previous occasions Roman officials had had to deal with troublesome foreign religious groups.” Taken with the imperial distrust of clubs (Pliny refers to Christians as *hetaerias*), the upheaval threatened by this boycott of sacrificial meats seems to have brought the Christians under a doubly careful scrutiny by Pliny. Interestingly, before the letter of inquiry is sent, Pliny embarked on a policy that provided his own answer. Several Christians of various ages and social standing were corralled into his chambers and were only asked if they were a Christian (although in what appears to be an attempt to show either fairness or clemency each person was given three opportunities to answer the question). An affirmative answer was to bring death and a negative response promised continued life and freedom. Because some who answered in the affirmative were Roman citizens, they were spared the death sentence. These were jailed until they (like the apostle Paul half a century before) could be transferred to the imperial court



The amazing result of the church's confrontation with the world in the Apostolic Paradigm was its growth.<sup>48</sup> It grew because the Church and its members knew who they were; they knew who the world was; they knew their mission; and they carried out that mission with clarity and a confidence in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus prior to his ascension.<sup>49</sup> As David Wells writes, "The Christian movement would have remained tiny but for one fact: the first Christians knew that their faith was absolutely true, that it could brook no rivals, and so they sought no compromises. That was the kind of integrity that God, the Holy Spirit, blessed and used in the ancient world in spreading the knowledge of Christ."<sup>50</sup> Their confidence was not only in a person, but in Truth, Truth that they believed was both enduring and absolute. This Truth was not a philosophical concept for them, it was not an indefinable or unknowable object of speculation, it was not even a thing—Truth was a person. Truth exists. Truth came into the world in the human form of the God/man Jesus Christ, the birthed, living, breathing, eating, sleeping, walking, talking, crucified and resurrected full embodiment of all that God Himself is. Although the apostles "were encircled by many superstitions, many religious claims, and were constantly under the gaze of a Roman power that demanded their

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in Rome. Pliny's actions are outlined here to show how easily and quickly Christians could be called upon to testify for their beliefs in a suspicious and intolerant culture. The martyrdoms of Polycarp, Cyprian, Perpetua, Felicitas and the massacre at Lyon are more examples showing us the animus and capriciousness of the Roman response to Christians.

<sup>48</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity, A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7, estimates a Christian population of 33,882,008 by the year AD 350 or 56.5% of the total population. Others place the percentage of Christians at a small as 10%.

<sup>49</sup> Veith, "Catechesis, Preaching, and Vocation," makes the point in that "The early church was not market-driven. It did not make Christianity particularly user-friendly. Non-Christians could attend the preaching service, but they had to leave when the Holy Communion was celebrated. Converts had to go through extensive, lengthy catechesis and examination before they were accepted for baptism. In the ultimate barrier to new member assimilation, those who did become Christians faced the death penalty. Nevertheless, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the church grew like wildfire." 85.

<sup>50</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 104.

total allegiance at pain of death,” they were still unafraid to proclaim this Truth as the only way. “It was this truth that rattled the bones of the Caesars” and led to the state-sponsored persecution and martyrdom.<sup>51</sup>

With the conversion of Emperor Constantine<sup>52</sup> and the subsequent Edict of Milan Christianity began its move from the Apostolic Paradigm into what Mead calls the Christendom Paradigm, or what Yoder and others refer to as the Constantian era.<sup>53</sup> The hithertofore maligned, hunted and persecuted bishops, priests, deacons, and presbyters were suddenly made functionaries and employees of the empire. With the emperor’s decree the Church was free to exist unmolested. The Church was now a part of the Empire and the Empire was in the Church. Soon little difference was to be seen between the pomp and ceremonial display of the empire’s celebrations and the way the Church displayed itself to the world:

The adhesion to Christianity of Constantine...was a development of the utmost weight and significance in Christian history. All sorts of relationships were turned topsy-turvy by it. From being a vulnerable, if vibrant, sect liable to intermittent persecution at the hands of the secular authorities, Christians suddenly found themselves part of the ‘establishment’.... Christian bishops were no longer just the disciplinarians of tightly organized sectarian cells but rapidly assimilated as quasi civil servants into the mandarinat which administered the

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<sup>51</sup> David F. Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 76.

<sup>52</sup> I am happy to allow others to speculate on the genuineness of this conversion. History marks this date as Constantine’s conversion and for the purposes of this paper the spiritual reality of that conversion is moot. Constantine acted as though he was converted in regard to his endorsement of Christianity within his realms. For example: See Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God, How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-hunts, and the End of Slavery*, (Princeton: Princeton, NJ, 2003), 33-34 “Far too long, historians have accepted the claim that the conversion of the Emperor Constantine caused the triumph of Christianity. To the contrary, he destroyed its most attractive and dynamic aspects, turning a high-intensity, grassroots movement into an arrogant institution controlled by an elite who often managed to be both brutal and lax.” Laurie Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity*, 113-114 “Very disturbing to modern minds is Constantine’s execution of his son Crispus for adultery in AD 326, and then his subsequent forcing of his second wife, Fausta, to commit suicide after he had concluded that she had manipulated the situation to bring about her stepson’s death. How could ‘Christian’ Constantine do such things?” What we do know is that the standing of Christians in law and before society changed quickly and irreversibly when Constantine ascended to the throne. 117.

<sup>53</sup> See Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 23-32.

empire. Their churches were no longer obscure conventicles but public buildings of increasing magnificence.<sup>54</sup>

Mead says that the change was slow in coming, taking centuries, for the Christendom Paradigm to settle in and take control. He may be correct, inasmuch as the ramifications and out-workings of Constantine's edict took until the late middle ages to come into full flower; but its effects were felt immediately in many very practical ways. Richard Fletcher writes that "the process by which the empire became *officially* Christian may be said to have been completed" by A.D. 395.<sup>55</sup>

In the early years following the new toleration for Christianity, Constantine passed laws that not only gave Christianity official status but also exempted clergy from civic duties.<sup>56</sup> This law "precipitated a stampede into the priesthood"<sup>57</sup> and required follow-up legislation prohibiting the wealthy from pursuing ordination in order to escape the costliness of their obligations to serve on town councils!<sup>58</sup> Bishops were now called upon and required to alleviate the over-taxed courts by serving as adjudicators in many civil law cases, including granting freedom to slaves. Even the army felt the official presence of the Church when Christian pastors were appointed as chaplains.

Constantine made certain that his new religion was attended with appropriate buildings, churches, and shrines at holy sites. Money was spent for both construction and maintenance. Funds came directly from the imperial coffers as well as from rents

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: from Paganism to Christianity*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 22.

<sup>55</sup> Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Paul McKechnie, *The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 237.

<sup>57</sup> Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 38.

<sup>58</sup> Ivor J. Davidson, *A Public Faith: From Constantine to the Medieval World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 20-25.

on public lands.<sup>59</sup> When Constantinople was built, it was done so without a single pagan temple but with numerous Christian churches.<sup>60</sup> In addition to a large influx of money from the state for the operation of local churches, it now became legal for churches to receive legacies from rich donors.

This latter law came at a cost to the Jewish community who lost this right for their synagogues. In addition, the Jews, whom Constantine called a “gloomy sect,” lost their freedom to punish apostates (converts from Judaism to Christianity) while those who converted to Judaism were to be burned alive.<sup>61</sup> Lastly, at Constantine’s order, Eusebius of Caesarea was commissioned to preserve and restore the Christian Scriptures that the emperor’s predecessor Diocletian had tried to eradicate. The commission called for fifty copies of Scripture to be prepared at the state’s expense.<sup>62</sup>

Eusebius repaid the emperor’s largess by describing Constantine as the instrument chosen by God for the conversion of the empire.<sup>63</sup> In Eusebius’ thinking, the new era of imperial favor was understood as God’s special provision, blessing, and the climax of his redemptive purposes!<sup>64</sup> Interpreting the conversion of Constantine as eschatology fulfilled, Eusebius saw the now-Christian emperor standing “immediately under *Christos Pantokrator*; and the state unequivocally in

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<sup>59</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 437 “...Constantine’s ardor for Christianity was unbounded. Churches were built with imperial funds in the major cities of the empire.” “In the city of Constantine in Numidia where the Donatists had seized the main basilica, Constantine wrote to the Catholics telling them to apply to the financial officer...for funds to build another.” 503.

<sup>60</sup> Jones, *Pagan Mind*, Like their predecessors, the pagan temples, these new churches stood on public lands free from taxes. 19.

<sup>61</sup> Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 488.

<sup>62</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 180.

<sup>63</sup> McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 58.

<sup>64</sup> Davidson *Public Faith*, 20-25; Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 2d edition, (Boston: Blackwell: 2002), 18-53; McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 59.

the realm of redemption.<sup>65</sup> Constantine was “the friend of God [who] frames his earthly government according to the pattern of the divine original.”<sup>66</sup> Eusebius called him “our divinely favored emperor,” who had received “a transcript of the divine sovereignty to direct in imitation of God himself, the administration of this world’s affairs.”<sup>67</sup> This elevation allowed Constantine to hold a unique distinction as “the one human being to have enjoyed...being deified as a pagan god, while at the same time he was popularly venerated as a Christian saint.”<sup>68</sup>

When the church and the world became a single entity, the boundary lines that separated the two previously contrasting entities evaporated. Yoder writes, “the most ‘pertinent fact’ of the Constantinian shift was not that the church was no longer persecuted but that the two visible realities of the church and the world were fused. There was, in a sense, no longer anything to call ‘world’—state, economy, art, rhetoric, superstition and war were all baptized...”<sup>69</sup> With the Empire Christianized and all citizens now Christians, there was no longer need of evangelism, no need of mission, no fear of reprisals, and no need to retain or even to pursue, a life of holiness and separation for the purpose of witness. Instead of the congregation being a small local group that constituted the Church in a localized place, the understanding of the congregation had been enlarged to include everyone in the Empire. The community was the Church; the Church was the Empire. There was no boundary

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<sup>65</sup> Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” 59.

<sup>66</sup> Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*, 22; Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, “Constantine apparently agreed with Eusebius calling himself ‘brother of the bishops,’ and regarding himself as ‘a sort of universal herald and propagandist for the faith, [and] protector of Christians even though these might be outside the boundaries of the empire.’” 500, 503.

<sup>67</sup> Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*, 22-23 Of course, “It is not to Eusebius that we must go to learn that Constantine murdered his father-in-law, his wife and his son.” 22.

<sup>68</sup> Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 23 quoting Charles Norris Cochrane, “Christianity and Classical Culture”.

<sup>69</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, quoted in Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 25.

between people on the local scene defining one group as “church” and another as “world.” In fact, the vast numbers of people flocking to the newly legitimized religion transformed Christianity from peculiarity to popularity. This blurred distinction made it necessary for theologians, most notably Augustine, to create a doctrine of the Church, that would allow them to “distinguish true believers from nominal or false believers...”<sup>70</sup> The result was the concept of the *true but now invisible Church*, those true believers who were known only to God, contrasted to the *visible Church* made up of those whose spiritual life was merely claimed by verbal confession and physical affiliation. Although this is a concept that is not identified nor explicitly recognized by the authors of the New Testament, it did (and does) open the door for the inclusion within the church of those whose lives do not reflect the Biblical characteristics of a true Christian. For the New Testament authors there was only one church in the world—the Church that visibly existed in the world. This church existed with “all its sinfulness, brokenness, conflict, doctrinal heresy, and lukewarmness.”<sup>71</sup>

The Christians of the first three centuries had known as a fact of experience that there was a true and pure church, but they would not be faulted if they wondered aloud about Christ’s reign. Constantine’s baptism of the Empire in the fourth century gave strong evidence that Christ was indeed ruling over their world, but they had to believe against evidence that there existed a true and pure Church.<sup>72</sup> The idea that there was only one Church, created by the spirit, possessing all the attributes of the

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<sup>70</sup> Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 26.

<sup>71</sup> Van Gelder, *Essence of the Church*, 105.

<sup>72</sup> This neat contrast comes from John Howard Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” quoted by Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 25-26.

Church, “motivated the early church to work zealously”<sup>73</sup> to bring the missionary message of the Gospel to every part of the non-church community. However, when the idea of the visible church was given credence, this lukewarm, visible church was rooted and functioning in every part of the life of the culture. The missionary frontier disappeared from the doorstep of the congregation and moved to the edges of the geographic boundaries of the empire, far away and far removed from everyday life.<sup>74</sup> This amalgam, or confusion, of church and culture was a greater loss than gain for the Church. No longer was the individual Christian “personally and intimately” on the mission frontier. “The individual is no longer called to ‘witness’ in a hostile environment.”<sup>75</sup> Instead, the missionary enterprise took place far from home and became “the responsibility of the professional—the soldier’s job for the political realm and the specially designated missionary’s job for the religious realm.”<sup>76</sup> Instead of encouraging Christians to become more vibrant in their witness and bold in their lifestyle as a peculiar people, the removal of hostility and opposition dulled the edge of witness. The truly converted were content to live with, and the yet unconverted witnessed, a Christianity that could not cut through the real needs and concerns of life.<sup>77</sup> Or as Jacques Ellul said, “Christendom astutely abolished Christianity by making us all Christians, and the new Christianity that replaced the old “ceased to be an explosive ferment calling everything into question in the name

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<sup>73</sup> Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 25-26.

<sup>74</sup> Loren B. Mead, *Once and Future Church*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Mead, *Once and Future Church*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Mead, *Once and Future Church*, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Dunn-Wilson, *A Mirror for the Church*, 41-43.

of the truth that is in Jesus Christ” and became instead “the structural identity of this particular society.”<sup>78</sup>

The Roman Church—like all of Roman society—was highly organized both in terms of hierarchies and geography. Constantine had divided the Empire into administrative districts known as dioceses. The Church was divided into similar geographic and administrative districts also called dioceses. Within the diocese were smaller divisions called parishes. The identification of a local congregation included everyone within the geographical bounds of the parish. This identification removed the idea that the mission of the Church is evangelism outside of the geographical boundaries of the parish. Mission within the parish was organization of and care for its members. Mission for the individual parishioner was caring for and serving the organization of the local church. The boundaries of the parish were joined with other parishes, Christians bounded by Christians. As the Empire grew and as the influence of Christianity grew so did Christendom. Interaction with the world in the sense of Christians evangelizing pagans was not a part of the daily life of the everyday citizen. Eventually the dulled knife of Christian witness was put into a bejeweled scabbard to be viewed and admired as a quaint relic of bygone era.

While Loren Mead’s analysis is accurate at one level, we must hasten to admit that in large portions of the church there has always been a sense of *us* and *them*, those who are in and those who are out; the saved and the lost. Those who understand themselves to be truly converted and born again, the called out ones, have always known and have been told that there is indeed a definable difference between the church and the world, and that those in the Church are called to bring the gospel

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<sup>78</sup> David Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003), 40.



to those who are outside it—whether they be nearby or far away. The gospel is to be lived, shown by good works, preached, and in J. B. Philips’ wonderful phrase, gossiped the good news. But even those who would defend this view of Christianity in North America have to admit that for most Christians, mission is still something *over there* and far away from the safety of our civilized and Christian Western order. The pervasiveness and power of the Christendom mindset still tempts Western Christians to think of evangelism not as presenting the gospel message across culture lines to a Gospel-ignorant audience but instead presenting the familiar message of Christ to an already Gospel-oriented culture. One of the poisonous fruits of Constantinian Christianity is the Church’s blindness to the necessity of mission to the people within the borders of Christendom.

### **The Apostolic Paradigm Moves into the Middle Ages**

The Medieval era of the Christendom Paradigm was a constant confusion and competition between the Church and State for authority, power, and reward.<sup>79</sup> When Julian the Apostate failed to re-paganize the empire (AD 360-363)<sup>80</sup>, when Theodosius bowed in public humility and penance before Ambrose (AD 390),<sup>81</sup> when Pope Leo I negotiated a peace with the Vandals (AD 455),<sup>82</sup> when Pope Gregory I (AD 590-604) brought order in Rome by taking the administrative reins,<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Stephen O’Shea, *Sea of Faith, Islam and Christianity in the Medieval Mediterranean World*, (New York: Walker & Company, 2006, writes that as a result of the marriage of church and state, “Christianity became the handmaiden of power...the arbiter of the ontologically correct and, more important, the medium through which authority flowed.” 13. How quickly, it seems, that the Church had lost sight of her Master’s declarations that “my kingdom is not of this world,” “do not be like the Gentiles who lord it over others,” and the call to humility and suffering outlined in the beatitudes!

<sup>80</sup> Frend, “Hero of a Lost Cause: The Emperor Julian 360-363” *The Rise of Christianity*, 593-613.

<sup>81</sup> Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 624-625.

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.drshirley.org/hist/hist10.html>, (accessed June 28, 2008).

<sup>83</sup> Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 883-892.

and when Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Emperor (Christmas Day A.D. 800),<sup>84</sup> the prelate was exercising the power of moral conscience mixed with political clout backed with military might.

However, the church's power and influence over the state and its leaders was not always constructive. All too often the Church allowed itself to be co-opted and reduced to the role of perfunctory blessing-giver to the culture's *status quo*. The Church, anxious to maintain its place of approval within the culture, no longer asked, "How can we survive as faithful Christians in the face of deadly persecution?" but "How can we adjust the church's moral and ethical expectations 'so that Caesar can consider himself a faithful Christian'?"<sup>85</sup> The Church was reduced to the role of administrative arm of the state "on the same level with the army or the post office"<sup>86</sup> "that arranges to have preachers in the pulpits."<sup>87</sup> Rodney Clapp calls this acquiescence of the church its "sponsorship of Western civilization,"<sup>88</sup> and Henri Nouwen writes that the result of this capitulation to the state is a Church that is little more than the chaplain of Western civilization powerlessly standing on the sidelines, far from the center of things but quite certain that it is needed and appreciated by that culture.<sup>89</sup>

The Constantinian paradigm brought the "conversion" of entire peoples, such as the Balkans by Ufilias, the Germanic tribes through Boniface, the Irish through Patrick, and the Franks under Clovis. When the Church thought it necessary, it asked

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<sup>84</sup> Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*, 329.

<sup>85</sup> Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 26.

<sup>86</sup> Yoder, "Otherness of the Church," 60.

<sup>87</sup> John Howard Yoder "Let the Church be the Church," *The Royal Priesthood*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 170.

<sup>88</sup> Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 17.

<sup>89</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, (Garden City, NY: Image/Doubleday, 1979), 86-87.

the state to use its force to effect these conversions. These “forced” conversions extended the tension of the visible/invisible church concept by bringing increasing numbers of wholly unconverted peoples within the pale of Christianity. The result was an easy conversion without true faith that led to an easy life without true Biblical moorings or morals. The church not only reduced its expectations of the moral behavior of the king, but also of the masses of people in all walks of life for whom the reality of the Lordship of Christ made no concrete difference in their lives at all.<sup>90</sup>

When Christian profession came to mean nothing in the public arena, Christians fled to the desert and monastery to live out their faith in uncompromised seclusion.<sup>91</sup> Since this option was not always open, easily attained, or desired by every pious believer, the dichotomy between the secularity of the public square and the sacredness of the inner person was birthed. True Christian piety began to be practiced and lived out in private and rather than in public. No longer was Christian faith allowed or required to make an impact in the secular arena. It was acceptable as an external religion only as long as it did not impinge upon the morals, economics, thought processes, and wars of the surrounding world/culture. Os Guinness writes that individuals in a privatized faith world “are free to build a world of their own to their hearts’ content—so long as they rock none of the boats in the real world.”<sup>92</sup> He

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<sup>90</sup> Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 26. Alan Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 104, [the] “element of vigorous discipleship that characterized the early Christian movement...was blighted by the deluge of worldliness that flooded the post-Constantinian Church when the bar was lowered and the culture was “Christianized.”

<sup>91</sup> Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File, Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 77; David Wells, *No Place for Truth*, locates this bifurcation of private and public much later but with similar effect: “the impulse of modernity have generally sundered private from public...beliefs were increasingly limited to matters of private existence, increasingly shorn of their distinctive worldview, and increasingly withdrawn from what was external and public. Being evangelical has come to mean simply that one has had a certain kind

goes on to write that when Christianity was privatized, Christendom's "grand, global umbrella of faith [was] shrunk to the size of a plastic rain hat."<sup>93</sup>

The Reformers unwittingly lived under the sway of the Christendom Paradigm. Even while holding as they did to the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, they called on the [Christian] State to enforce their new doctrinal views and appealed to the State (most generally in the form of territorial princes) to adopt the mores of Scripture as its own. No longer did the church have the final word in matters of religion, but the "State has the last word and incarnates the ultimate values of God's work in the world. Church discipline [was] applied by the civil courts and police. It is assumed that there was nothing wrong with this since the true Church being invisible, is not affected."<sup>94</sup>

Since the Reformers were enculturated into the Christendom, they did not have the tools to examine their culture or even mindset that would alert them to the necessity. This is a situation the church cannot afford to repeat today. At the same time, however, the reformers ought not to be too critically faulted at this point since, they believed that the prince or magistrate was ordained by God (Romans 13:1ff). It was meet and right for the magistrate to enforce God's rule of righteousness and to wield the sword on behalf of that righteousness embodied in the Church. The claim

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of religious experience that gives color to the private aspects of daily life but in which few identifiable theological elements can be discerned, or, as it turns out are necessary. Evangelical faith is pursued as a matter of internal fascination but abandoned as a matter of external and public relevance, except in areas of social relief..." 130-131. Lesslie Newbigin makes the point in *The Gospel in Pluralistic Society*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) that it is impossible to have private beliefs and personal truth. "When I say 'I believe,' I am not merely describing an inward feeling or experience. I am affirming what I believe to be true, and therefore is true for everyone. The test of my commitment to the belief will be that I am ready to publish it, to share it with others, and to invite their judgment and—if necessary—correction. If I refrain from this exercise, if I try to keep my belief as a private matter, it is not belief in the truth. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 79.

<sup>94</sup> Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 28.

that they were operating according to a Constantinian paradigm may be anachronistic. Furthermore, they would have assumed that the magistrate was also a member of the church and an ally in the fight to expand the kingdom of Christ by renewing the visible, faithful body of believers. Finally, by allowing the state to exercise its authority on the Church's behalf, the reformers were merely taking a page from the Church's playbook written and approved by Augustine, who had called upon the emperor and his armies to harry and rout the "heretical" Donatists of his day.

The civil government's might was used equally by the church upon heretics within Christendom (e.g. the Waldensians) and infidels without (e.g. the Crusades). The Church's original marching orders included demolishing strongholds without the weapons of this world. When the church and empire married, power was joined to piety. The "enemies of the cross" could be coerced into submission or destroyed for unsubmitivenss by the sword of the State under the Church's smile of approval.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," *The Priestly Kingdom*, (Norte Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135-147. "Two further symbolic shifts spell out the implications of the Constantinian age at the borders of Christendom. Once 'Christendom means Empire, non-Empire is a new challenge. The era of Charlemagne demonstrates the option of annexation and fusion. Germanic values, legal traditions, social structures, and ruling families are 'baptized' globally. This does not mean, at least for most of them conversion in any deep sense. It rather means that the *name* of Jesus is now intoned over a Germanic culture without changing its inner content, as it had been into over the Greco-Roman culture for half a millennium before. 'Syncretism' is probably not the best label for the resulting mixture, since there is not so much genuine fusion and reconception as there is an overlaying of two cultures. The other symbolically powerful event is the Crusade. When the other 'world' at the border is not open to interpenetration, the collision becomes a holy war. Mohammed will have to be met on his own terms. The outsider is not only no longer privileged, as he had been for Jesus and Paul, as the test for one's love (Matt 5:43ff; Luke 6:32ff) or as the proof of the new age (Eph 2). The outsider is not simply ignored, or disregarded as 'barbaric' or heretical, as Christian Rome had largely done. Now the outsider has become the 'infidel,' the incarnation of anti-faith. To destroy him, or to give one's life in the attempt, had become a positively virtuous undertaking, quite without regard for the ordinary criteria of justifiable violence (The so-called just war theory). Our world has a divinely imparted duty to destroy or to rule over the world." 137-138.

Sadly, as the cohesiveness of Christendom began to dissolve and nation states began to rise, the theories of war and violence that had been applied to infidel and heretic were now used to justify holy wars between two mini-Christendoms or one Christian nation-state against another. No longer does Ambrose humble Theodosius, Chrysostom call down the empress, Gregory VI force Fredrick to wait in Canossa's snow, or Innocent III place Prince John's England under interdict. Instead, French kings hold the papacy captive at Avignon, Norman knights murder Thomas á Becket before the altar at Canterbury, and the kings of Spain and Portugal enslave thousands in the New World over the Pope's weak and hesitant objections.<sup>96</sup>

As strong as the hold of Constantinian Christianity was on the church of the late Middle Ages, it was not unbreakable. The resistance to the propositions of the Reformation brought the armies of principalities, fiefdoms, and kingdoms one against another in an attempt to finalize the enforcement and acceptance of true doctrine (whether Reformation doctrine or the doctrine of the established Catholic Church). The lengthy conflict of what is now known as the Thirty Years' War on the Continent, The Wars of Religion in France, and the Puritan Civil Wars in England exhausted the patience of sensitive and thinking people, and in a very real way finalized the division of secular/sacred and public/ private faith.<sup>97</sup> Sincere but ultimately ineffective attempts at revitalizing and redeeming the moribund post-

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<sup>96</sup> See Os Guinness, "Las Casas before Charles V," *Unriddling our Times, Reflections on the Gathering Cultural Crisis*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 1-47; "Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*, (New York: Random House Paperback Editions, 2006), 30. The church responded vigorously, and a series of angry bulls against New World slavery were issued by sixteenth-century popes—but the popes has no serious temporal power in this era and their vigorous opposition was to no avail."

<sup>97</sup> Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), "...the war left a unique psychological impact upon its survivors and their posterity. Never before had there been such a universal sense of irretrievable disaster. The war was religiously divisive, morally subversive, economically destructive, socially degrading, and ultimately futile in its results." 21.

Reformation and post-Tridentine churches by the Puritans, Pietists and Jansenists<sup>98</sup> became themselves privatized expressions of personal piety with public impotency.<sup>99</sup> Even the Puritans in England lacked a vibrant cross-cultural missions agenda.<sup>100</sup> Speaking of the “remarkable absence of Protestant missions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,” D.W. Bebbington asks why the Roman Catholics could be so dedicated to taking the faith to the Far East at a time when Puritans were making very few efforts. Robert Bellarmine asked the same question at the end of the sixteenth century when he included missionary activity as one of eighteen marks of a true church. He reproached his contemporary Protestants in that they had no missions outreach comparable to the Catholic Church.<sup>101</sup> Bebbington’s answer is that an emphasis on the doctrine of predestination led ministers to encourage “people to doubt whether or not they were of the elect. That cultivated an introspective piety....The Puritans abounded in scholarship and godliness, but *because of the concentration on the inward life* there was no dynamic leading to mission” (emphasis added).<sup>102</sup> It was for Calvinists of a later generation to understand that this very doctrine of Divine election and predestination is the strongest impetus for missionary outreach and cultural reformation.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Brown, *Pietism*, 26.

<sup>99</sup> This is in no way meant to misunderstand or down play the powerful forces of cultural and religious renewal brought about by Spenser and the Pietists. Rather it is to point the increasing tendency both from within the church and without to force Christian expression into a privatized expression.

<sup>100</sup> John Eliot’s work among the Algonquin’s of New England is a notable example.

<sup>101</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1964), 221.

<sup>102</sup> D. W. Bebbington, “The Enlightenment and Evangelicalism,” *The Gospel in the Modern World*, Martyn Eden and David F. Wells, ed., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992, 66-84), 71

<sup>103</sup> John Piper, *A Theology for Missions*, [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByDate/1987/2660\\_A\\_Theology\\_of\\_Missions/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByDate/1987/2660_A_Theology_of_Missions/) (accessed August 3, 2008).

Craig Van Gelder offers a more satisfying answer to Bellarmine's question concerning the lack of missional impetus amongst Protestants from the perspective of the Constantinian captivity of the church during the Reformation. Van Gelder writes in *The Essence of the Church* that the reason for the loss of missional motivation during and following the wars of religion was that the primary concern of the Reformers was to correct the doctrinal error that had become part and parcel of the Medieval Church. Errors regarding salvation (by personal works of piety, application of the superabundance of the pious merits of the saints, the apprehension of grace through the sacraments whose flow was controlled by the church), authority (papal supremacy and infallibility, tradition, and the local priest), and the lives of clerics were attacked with vehemence by Zwingli, Luther, Calvin and their successors. The issue of the Reformation was reforming the Church and bringing it back to a doctrinal purity. Therefore the emphasis in the Reformation ecclesiology was to define the true and faithful church.<sup>104</sup> One sees this emphasis, says Van Gelder, in the creeds and confessions of the Reformation. In these confessions, the church attributes "most commonly listed were one and holy." In the Belgic Confession of 1566, the church is also described as "one single catholic or universal church—a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers." The creeds and confessions of the post-reformational period do not speak of the apostolic nature of the church. The Roman Catholic Church had used the argument of apostolic authority as a legitimization of the authority of the Church through its bishops—specifically the pope. In an attempt to correct this abuse, the reformers by emphasizing the sole authority of the Scriptures over-looked the necessity of the

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<sup>104</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 54-55.



missional mandate of the Church. Unintentionally the reformers' action caused the apostolic nature—that is the divinely sent-ness of the church—to fade into forgetfulness. The Reformation succeeded in its definition of the true Church as that in which (or the place where) there was true preaching of the Word of God, the Sacraments were properly administered, and careful discipline was maintained. The struggle of the Reformation was against the error of the Roman Catholic Church. It was not a struggle to take the truth and light into lands where “the lie” (Rom 1:25) and darkness still reigned. Because of their doctrinal concerns the Reformers allowed themselves to be “trapped within geographic Christendom, while their Catholic counterparts were engaged in colonial expansion. Protestant ‘mission’ became missions to the Catholics. While Protestants focused on Catholics, Catholic missions flourished.”<sup>105</sup>

Another result of the wars of religion was an erosion of confidence in the authority and trustworthiness of the dogmas and declarations of the church(es). The creedal declarations of the first generation of the Reformation were subjected to rethinking and revision in an attempt to make them more intellectually and emotionally palatable to a new generation. This movement is variously called Protestant Orthodoxy or Protestant Scholasticism. Scholasticism depended on human intellect and extreme applications of rationality and strict logic. “Aristotle, who had been thrown out the front door, quickly came in the back...Luther’s God who was a Thou, became an It. The testimony of the Holy Spirit became a mere

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<sup>105</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 23.

intellectual process of acquaintance with the truth....the Scriptures were used primarily as proof texts to verify creedal documents.<sup>106</sup>

### **The Christendom Paradigm Meets the Enlightenment Project**

This overweening dependence on human reason<sup>107</sup> and rationality with the “subversion of objective authority” was coupled with “zealous reactions to excessive traditionalism [and] rigid institutionalism”<sup>108</sup> and opened the door to what was called the *Aufklärung* in Germany and the Enlightenment in France and England. The Enlightenment was the beginning of the end of the Christendom paradigm. What began as an attempt to replace the hegemony of the church’s authority easily became permission to seek and appeal to authority sources other than the Bible, The Church, or Tradition. René Descartes made his own existence and reason the base line for determining what is really real. John Locke followed Descartes by bringing human experience to the table as the litmus test of reality. Newton put experience to the test of the scientific method. All three of these thinkers used inductive reasoning in their quest. The subject-thinker became the beginning and ending point of philosophical, ontological and epistemological inquiry.<sup>109</sup> Their influence was quickly felt in the orthodox Reformation community. Even the staunchly orthodox and reliable

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<sup>106</sup> Brown, *Pietism*, 24.

<sup>107</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, (New York: Random House, 2005), contends that the development of Christianity and the entirety of Western Civilization can be traced to a long tradition of the exaltation and appreciation of human reason. From the earliest days of Christianity, its theologians were required to apply human intellect to the development of The Faith because of its understanding of the nature of God, the image of God in human beings, and the application of sacred revelation to the relationship between God and man. “As for theology, it has little in common with most religious thinking, being a sophisticated, highly *rational* (emphasis in original) discipline that is fully developed only in Christianity. Sometimes described as ‘the science of faith,’ theology consists of *formal reasoning about God*. The emphasis is on *discovering* God’s nature, intentions, and demands, and understanding how these define the relationship between God and man.” 5.

<sup>108</sup> Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 25.

<sup>109</sup> For a good introduction to the birth and maturation of the Enlightenment Project see: Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 57-82; Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism*, 53-92.

Jonathan Edwards far across the Atlantic in the American colonies introduced human experience as part of his directions for fulfilling the quest for the certainty and assurance of salvation for his questioning parishioners.<sup>110</sup>

The enticing motivations for this pursuit of human-driven inquiry were the sweet tastes of human freedom and the promise of unlimited possibility of new discovery.<sup>111</sup> The traditional Christian use of reason, coupled with a strong confidence in progress, was bolstered and unfettered by the promises of freedom that would come from the use of the unaided human reason. “The Enlightenment’s centerpiece was freedom. Indeed, its *demand* was freedom: freedom from the past, freedom from God, and freedom from authority. It demanded freedom from every system of thought that would be resistant to its intellectual innovations. It resolutely opposed all ideas rooted in what was eternal, fixed, and unchanging.”<sup>112</sup> In another context Wells has written of the new vistas of intellectual freedom and exploration that beckoned the burgeoning Enlightenment project. The freedoms of the Enlightenment have stirred to a frenzy “the relentless assault on all the old certainties, religious and moral. It has untied our hands. We are now loosed from the old bonds. We spring forth as revolutionaries, prophets in a new millennium of unbelief, sages in a new world that recognizes only one God—Possibility.”<sup>113</sup>

D. W. Bebbington lists seven characteristics of the Enlightenment as: (1) belief in the scientific method; (2) optimism in the progress of humanity to a better

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<sup>110</sup> Bebbington, “The Enlightenment and Evangelism,” 73.

<sup>111</sup> Rodney Stark, *Victory of Reason*, ix-xvi.

<sup>112</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 29.

<sup>113</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 72.

future;<sup>114</sup> (3) moderation rather than doctrinal extremism or intolerance; (4) ethics and morality; (5) pragmatism and practicality; (6) matters of taste or seeking the highest aesthetics; (7) the impulse to reform.<sup>115</sup> The Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, however, was primarily the full flowering of Renaissance humanism and the enhanced status and understanding of humans and their innate abilities—especially in the realms of reason and intellect. This overly optimistic estimation of human capabilities “replaced God on the center stage in history...” and gauged his importance “according to his value for the human story.”<sup>116</sup>

An eighth characteristic can and should be added to this list. Enlightenment thinkers also consciously and aggressively wanted to remove God from their thinking. Peter Gay writes “...the most militant battle cry of the Enlightenment, *écrasez l’infame*, [erase the infamy] was directed against Christianity itself, against Christian dogma in all its forms, Christian institutions, Christian ethics, and the Christian view of man...”<sup>117</sup> The Enlightenment was not merely an attempt to address life’s questions through the grid of the human intellect and careful thinking, it was an attempt to reject religion as superstition and error.<sup>118</sup> David Hume himself thought that beyond the world of the Enlightenment, there lay a large desert of

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<sup>114</sup> In regard to this optimism David Wells asks *No Place for Truth*, “Who would have thought that after two awful world wars and many subsequent conflicts, Western thought would still be indulging in the myth of inevitable progress with a devotion that makes [most] Christian believers look like pikers?” 9.

<sup>115</sup> Bebbington, “The Enlightenment and Evangelism,” 75-76.

<sup>116</sup> Grenz, *Primer*, 61.

<sup>117</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 59.

<sup>118</sup> Gay, *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation*, 37.

darkness, of stubborn indifference, of illiteracy and superstition, a realm he described with obvious distaste as the realm of “Stupidity, Christianity & Ignorance.”<sup>119</sup>

The confidence of these Enlightenment thinkers was accepted by theologians and was expressed in 1931, by American Baptist Douglas Clyde Macintosh, who wrote,

As a result of acting intelligently on the hypothesis of the existence of a God great enough and good enough to justify our absolute self-surrender and confident, appropriating faith, there comes a religious experience of spiritual uplift and emancipation in which, as a complex of many psychological elements, there can be intuited empirically, or perceived, the operations of a Factor which we evaluate and interpret as divine, because of its absolute religious spiritual value. It is here then, and not in traditional creeds or sacred books as such, that we find revelation.<sup>120</sup>

When the unaided human intellect<sup>121</sup> replaced God and His revelation as the beginning point for human ontological, cosmological and epistemological inquiry, God became largely unnecessary. Man’s hubris is attracted to any system that places mankind at the center of importance. Because humanity fell prey to the temptation to have its eyes opened and to become like God, (Genesis 3) man-centeredness in the

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<sup>119</sup> Gay, *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation*, 20.

<sup>120</sup> Douglas Clyde Macintosh, “Empirical Theology and Some of its Misunderstandings,” *Review of Religion* 3 (May 1939) 398, quoted by Sidney E Ahlstrom *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 906.

<sup>121</sup> Macintosh, “Empirical Theology and Some of its Misunderstandings 3 (May 1939) 398, quoted by Sidney E Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven: Yale University. It is of utmost importance to stress the word *unaided* in the phrase. Neither the Scriptures, nor historic orthodox Christian Theology reject the use of human reason. For example, Jonathan “Edwards thinks that reason can prove that God exists, establish many of his attributes, discern our obligations to him, and mount a probable case for the credibility of scripture. But he also believes that grace is needed both to help the natural principles “against those things that tend to stupefy [them] and to hinder [their] free exercise,” and to sanctify “the reasoning faculty and” assist “it to see the clear evidence there is of the truth of religion in rational arguments.” (“Miscellanies,” nos. 626, 628; Edwards 1957, vol. 18, 155, 156f.)” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/edwards/> (accessed March 18, 2008), Rodney Stark, *Victory of Reason*, offers the examples of both Augustine and Aquinas as theologians who “celebrated reason as the means to gain greater insight into Divine intentions,” and Tertullian who “instructed in the second century, ‘reason is a thing of God, inasmuch as there is nothing which God the maker of all has not provided, disposed, ordained by reason—nothing which He has not willed should be handled and understood by reason.’” 8; “from the very earliest days, Christian theologians have assumed that the application of reason can yield an *increasingly accurate* understanding of God’s will.” 9.

arena of intellectualism and philosophical speculation easily becomes its own religious system. Men and women are magnetically attracted to any system that allows them to replace God in their lives. This was true of the intellectual commitment to the unaided human reason which allowed these enlightenment thinkers to relegate God to the backroom of cognitive necessity. This attractive religion of the intellectual elite that grew up in Protestant Europe and the American Colonies from the idea of the unnecessary God is known as Deism. The worldview of Deism posited that God was not only unnecessary but that He had absented Himself from the world and ruled Himself out of intervention in its workings, leaving it to function according to the laws that He Himself had left in place. God the creator was content to remain in the background, disconnected<sup>122</sup> from his creation and unwilling to intervene in its outworkings or to impose His will upon it. Deism was the Enlightenment's last nod to the idea of God. "To embrace materialism or even deism was to defy strong and persuasive pressures, to reject a rich, well-entrenched heritage, to make a deliberate choice—the choice of freedom."<sup>123</sup>

Evangelicals fought the skepticism of the emerging intellectual climate by seeking to integrate the rationality of the Enlightenment with their faith. One such response that powerfully controlled much of American moral and faith thinking was the Scottish Common Sense philosophy brought to Princeton by John Witherspoon. In an attempt to show that there are truths which can be understood and accepted by

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<sup>122</sup> "Theirs was, to say the least, an inert God, one who had withdrawn to a great distance and simply observed life without interfering with it." David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 33 In another place Wells speaks of the present view of "The divine had now been rendered harmless or it has become an irrelevance." 28. In *God in the Wasteland, The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 88-118, Wells writes at length of the "weightlessness of God" While neither of these descriptions are given in reference to Deism, both are children of modernity grandfathered by Deism and the Enlightenment.

<sup>123</sup> Gay, *The Enlightenment*, 60.

mere common sense (i.e. universal experience), without an appeal to God or to Scripture, but which are taught and claimed by Scripture, Witherspoon's disciples soon dispatched God from the conversation just as easily as the Deists had.<sup>124</sup>

Thomas Oden claims that the beginning of the fundamentalist movement in the 1920s was nothing less than thorough-going historical, orthodox theists using *the categories and rules* of the Enlightenment to counter the atheistic claims of rationalism. When Fundamentalism fought to prove the intellectual coherence and credibility of Christianity, it did so by “historically establishing its objective [without the use of Scripture] factual origin.”<sup>125</sup> Meaning and application of the scientifically provable facts were only of secondary and tertiary importance in comparison to the historicity of the facts themselves.<sup>126</sup> In this, Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, Liberalism, and Neo-Orthodoxy all fell prey to the same temptation to wear the

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<sup>124</sup> Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 156-157, Noll sees a direct link between Scottish Common Sense philosophy and an Enlightenment style rationalism that bred the same kind of rationalistic Protestant liberalism that grew in Germany during the early nineteenth-century. Both Noll and Sidney Ahlstrom have also popularized the theory that the rationalism that grew at Princeton University also affected the theological method of the theologians of Old Princeton from Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield through J. Gresham Machen. Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Right Reason and the Princeton Mind, An Unorthodox Proposal*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), dispels Noll's conclusions as a wrong reading of the historical material and makes the case that these men always held to orthodox views of Scripture while applying the scientific method to their doing of theology. They did so with a spirit seeking to both understand and teach theology in a manner that would answer their liberal critics and encourage the faithful. For further reading see: David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Faithful Learning, 1812-1868*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), and *Princeton Seminary, The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), W. Andrew Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge the Pride of Princeton*, forward by Mark A. Noll, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), Fred A. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield, A Systematic Summary*, forward by Sinclair Ferguson, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), “The Princeton Theology,” Mark A. Noll, in David Wells, ed. *Reformed Theology in American*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 15-35; David F. Wells, “Charles Hodge,” *Reformed Theology in America*, 36-59, and W. Andrew Hoffercker, “Benjamin B. Warfield,” *Reformed Theology in American*, 60-88.

<sup>125</sup> Oden, “On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age,” 19.

<sup>126</sup> Oden, “On Not Whoring After the Spirit of the Age,” 19.

clothes of cultural, academic, and intellectual respectability.<sup>127</sup> Os Guinness tells of a conversation he had “in the early 1970s with a world renowned social scientist at Oxford University” who said, “By the end of the 1970s, I guarantee the worldliest Christians in America will be the Fundamentalists.”<sup>128</sup> Why would this man make this kind of startling prediction? It is because Christians have unwittingly allowed the elements of the Enlightenment to sneak up on them without their realizing it.<sup>129</sup> Peter Berger warned “that whoever sups with the devil of Modernity [the Enlightenment] had better have a long spoon. ‘The devilry of modernity has its own magic.’ The believer “who sups with it will find his spoon getting shorter and shorter—until that last supper when he is left alone at the table, with no spoon at all and with an empty plate.”<sup>130</sup> Lesslie Newbigin uses the metaphor of the battlefield and says that when Christian apologists used the rationalistic assumptions of the

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<sup>127</sup> It is interesting to note that Adolph Harnack claimed the decline of Christianity in his day (late nineteenth-century Germany) was “to be attributed to the baleful habit that emerged very early on of clothing Christianity in the thought forms of the day, especially those that were Hellenistic. This began with the apostles and continued without pause in all the succeeding centuries, the result being that the absolute character of Christian faith was polluted by its union with what was relative. This union produced the dogmatic, intellectualizing, external doctrine that passed itself off as authoritative, and Church people were told that they had to assent to it in order to be faithful. This development destroyed the essence of the Christian faith.” David Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 118. This is the same Harnack of whom George Tyrell has written regarding his attempts to reduce Christianity (and Christ) to its primitive purity: “The Christ Harnack sees looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness is only the reflection of a liberal Protestant face seen at the bottom of a deep well.” Quoted in Alistair McGrath, *Passion for Truth*, 59; Brian McLaren’s postmodern prophet, Neo says in *A New Kind of Christian*, “one thing that both modern liberals and conservatives have in common is that they read the Bible in very modern ways. Modern Christians treat the Bible as if it were a modern book. They’re used to reading modern history texts and modern encyclopedias and modern science articles and modern legal codes, and so they assume that the Bible will yield its resources if they approach it like one of those texts. But none of these categories existed when the Bible was written....The conservatives seem somewhat blind to these kinds of differences....The modern liberals seems to make a corresponding mistake. They acknowledge the Bible is a different kind of text from our modern texts, but then in a sense judge it by modern standards. If something doesn’t fit in with a modern Western mind-set, that reveres objectivity, science, democracy, individualism, that sort of thing, it is dismissed as primitive and irrelevant.” 55-56.

<sup>128</sup> Os Guinness, “Mission in the Face of Modernity” *The Gospel in the Modern World*, Martyn Eden and David Wells, ed., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 85-107.

<sup>129</sup> Guinness, “Mission in the Face of Modernity,” 86.

<sup>130</sup> Guinness, *Dining With the Devil*, 31.



Enlightenment to defend the faith rather than challenging them and calling their validity into question they were not advancing but instead making a “tactical retreat.” When these tactical retreats are repeated often enough the fantasy of advance or holding one’s ground fades into the reality that what indeed has occurred is a rout by the enemy.<sup>131</sup>

Without a firm confidence in the (1) the reality, knowability, credibility, and necessity of God (2) the veracity of Scripture as self-authenticating Divine revelation (3) the plausibility of faith (4) human worth, and (5) religious roots provided by Tradition—each successive generation of Christian thinkers sought to reinvent themselves and justify their continued existence by buying into the Enlightenment’s presupposition that the new, because it is new, is good and the old, because it is old, is less to be desired. “New” in the theological enterprise was good and necessary because it showed a commitment to the Enlightenment optimism in the onward march of human progress. This optimism has been hard for Americans to shake.

David Wells says,

...beneath all the difficulties and disappointments that modernity has brought, there still resides a belief in progress; we continue to think, or fervently hope, that we are still moving toward a better future. The truth of the matter is that most Americans are impatient with nay-sayers and are disinclined to indulge, or even attempt to understand, those who think that the basis for such hope might be gone. It is not merely that Americans typically think that such arguments are wrong; more importantly they think that these arguments are *offensive*. They violate an important tenet of the cultural creed—namely, that there is always hope because things are always improving, despite the fact that under secular auspices there is no truth by which one can judge whether a culture is moving forward or backward.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 3.

<sup>132</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 67.

The “old” of the religious tradition was soon little more than a threadbare garment stretched onto the shape demanded by each season’s latest theological innovation.

### **The Christendom Paradigm and Modernity**

The child of the Enlightenment is Modernity. Modernity is not the same as “our contemporary world” in the sense that today is modern and current, while yesterday is past and passé.<sup>133</sup> Modernity, in Eddie Gibbs’ definition, is “an understanding of the world through an autonomous and human rationality.”<sup>134</sup> In this world there is no place or need for supernatural revelation. Anything that needs to be known could be discovered and known by reason. Modernity is a time and place where universal truth may exist, but mystery does not—at least not for long. It replaces faith in “the ‘top-down’ causation of God and the supernatural,” with confidence in the ability of Man to effect “bottom up” changes.<sup>135</sup> One of the specious seeds sown by the Enlightenment which now blooms in Modernity is the elimination of “the ‘mystery’ of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For it was beyond the powers of human reason to reconcile a holy God with sinful human kind. That message could only be known through God’s revelation in Jesus Christ...”<sup>136</sup> One is reminded of Francis Schaeffer’s phrase that “nature has eaten grace.”<sup>137</sup> The message of reconciliation that is most needed cannot be discovered, let alone known, by relying solely on human experience and reason. The modernist depending on self

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<sup>133</sup> “Many use the word modernity as if were a fancy word for ‘change’ or simply a matter of being ‘up to date.’ They therefore treat it as something that is simple and straightforward—as if one can understand it through monitoring the latest trends and statistics—and put it to use simply like a new fax machine or laser printer.” Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Hourglass Books, 1993) 41.

<sup>134</sup> Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 22.

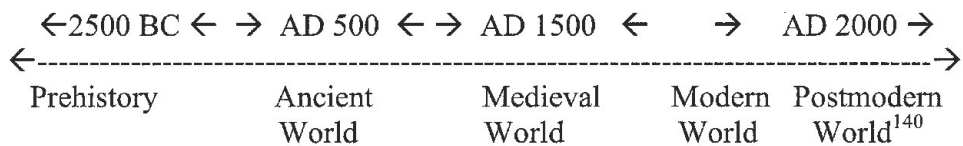
<sup>135</sup> Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 41-42.

<sup>136</sup> Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 41-42.

<sup>137</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1968), 13, 15. Later in his discussion Schaeffer says that Nature was killing grace, and finally, that grace was dead.

finds biblical revelation to be a “remarkable illustration” of what he has already discovered and heard within himself. This is not what the Bible is meant to do. The Bible allows the one who encounters it to make a “remarkable discovery of what we have not and cannot hear within ourselves.”<sup>138</sup>

Brian D. McLaren has written extensively about the cultural shift and sea change from Modernity to Postmodernity.<sup>139</sup> In *A New Kind of Christian*, he charts the intellectual timeline of the Western world’s move from prehistory to Postmodernity in this manner:



He then describes Modernity with ten phrases to set up the contrast of the emergent postmodern condition. McLaren says that Modernity is/was an:

1. Era of *conquest and control*, evidenced by world exploration, subjugation and destruction of peoples, eliminating diseases, cross-continental railroads, space travel, and altering the face of the earth with excavations and grand projects such as the Panama Canal.<sup>141</sup>
2. Age of the *machine*
3. Age of *analysis*. “The fact that to us *thinking* and *analyzing* seem to be synonymous suggests how successful Modernity has been at marginalizing other forms of thought—imagination, intuition, pattern recognition, [and] systems thinking...”
4. Age of *secular science* “With mechanistic and scientific views of the universe gaining hegemony and analytical minds swearing unyielding antipathy toward any invincible mystery that couldn’t be broken down into controllable parts (God, for instance), nation states and their cultures rose above ecclesiastical influence. It’s no wonder that religion was scurrying in retreat in the modern

<sup>138</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 279.

<sup>139</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); *The Last Word and the Word After That*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); *Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>140</sup> McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 16.

<sup>141</sup> This list and all quotes within in it are from McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 16ff.

era, fleeing the exterminating gas of modern science and secularism, like cockroaches from an apartment building. Perhaps religion could survive in the hidden corners of the private sector, but in the public sector it was seen by the scientific establishment as a dirty embarrassment, unsanitary, unwelcome, and gauche.”

5. *Age aspiring to absolute objectivity*, “In Modernity, the ultimate intelligibility of the universe was assumed. What was still unknown was ultimately unknowable. Also assumed was the highest faith in human reason to replace all mysteries with comprehension, superstition with fact, ignorance with information, and subjective religious faith with objective truth.”
6. It was a *critical age*. “If you believe that you absolutely, objectively know the absolute, objective truth, and you know this with absolute certainty, then of course you must debunk anyone who sees differently from you. Besides, in an age of conquest, if your ideas don’t win, they lose. So the modern age was an age of debate, dialectic, argument, and discussion.”
7. It was an age of the *modern nation-state and organization*.
8. It was the age of *individualism*. “The modern era moved inexorably from a focus on ‘we’ to a focus on ‘me.’ Never have individuals been so ‘free’ of all social constraint and connection as they are in late Modernity. Not surprisingly, never have they felt so alienated and isolated.
9. It was the age of *Protestantism and institutional religion*.
10. It was the age of *consumerism*. “An age when people often quoted the maxim, ‘money can’t buy happiness’ but seldom acted as if they believed it.”

One of the problems with this analysis is that it looks more like the Age of Reason rather than a new and different era that has grown from it. Another problem is that many who read it will see the present and not the past. For example, we in the West are still exploring, still seeking to conquer unknown worlds and problems, and still depending on machines, analysis and scientific objectivity in order to do so. Lonely people are still alienated and shout out their uniqueness through their individuality while rampant consumerism continues to plague us.

Millard J. Erickson lists ten features of modernism that focus more on philosophical and ideological foundations than the consequences of those foundations as McLaren does. It will be helpful to have Erickson’s list in mind as the transition from Modernity to the Age of Mission is discussed.

1. Naturalism—meaning that reality is believed to be restricted to the observable systems of nature. Its immanent laws are the cause of all that occurs.
2. Humanism—the human is the highest reality and value, the end for which all of reality exists rather than the means to the service for some higher being.
3. The Scientific method
4. Reductionism—from being considered the best means for gaining knowledge, the scientific method came increasingly to be considered the only method, so that various disciplines sought to attain the objectivity and precision of the natural sciences. Humans in some cases were regarded as nothing but highly developed animals.
5. Progress—because knowledge is good, humanly attainable, and growing, we are progressively overcoming the problems that have beset the human race.
6. Nature—rather than being fixed and static, nature came to be thought of as dynamic, growing and developing. Thus it was able to produce the changes in life forms through immanent processes of evolution, rather than requiring explanation in terms of a creator and designer.
7. Certainty—because knowledge was seen as objective, it [and knowers] could attain certainty. This required foundationalism, the belief that it is possible to base knowledge on some sort of absolute first principles... An alternative was empiricism, the belief that there are purely objective sensory data from which knowledge can be formulated.
8. Determinism—all that happens in the universe is a result of fixed causes and overarching laws, even human behavior. Human discovery of these laws that controlled the universe could also lead to control of the laws by humans.
9. Individualism—the idea of the knower as the solitary individual, carefully protecting his own objectivity by weighing all options. Truth being objective, can discovered by the individual's own efforts. They can free themselves from the conditioning particularities of their own time and place and know reality as it is in itself.
10. Anti-Authoritarianism—the human was considered the final and most complete measure of truth. Any externally imposed authority, whether that of the group or of a supernatural being, must be subjected to scrutiny and criticism by human reason.<sup>142</sup>

David Wells defines Modernity differently, seeing it as the result of modernization that he calls a vortex that is powered by the forces of capitalism, technological innovation, and the organization of business that is required for the manufacture of goods.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, Os Guinness sees Modernity as the product of

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<sup>142</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 16-17.

<sup>143</sup> David Wells gives what he calls a 'brief sketch of modernity' in *No Place for Truth*, 72-78.

“three revolutions in human experience: (1) the economic revolution, centring [*sic*] especially on the development of market capitalism since the thirteenth century; (2) the industrial revolution, centring especially on the technological innovations since the eighteenth century; and (3) the political revolution, centring especially on the ideological movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”<sup>144</sup>

The resulting culture/society growing out of this confluence of forces is so pervasive that there is little place for either individuality or freedom of thought, says Wells.<sup>145</sup> The Enlightenment did not give birth to a society that is thriving in the realization of a promised unfettered human freedom. On the contrary, the Enlightenment’s child, Modernity, has given rise to a generation shackled in the lockstep of sameness and conformity. Max Weber described “the relentless power and pervasiveness” of Modernity as “an ‘iron cage’ around human life,” and Peter L. Berger likens it to “a ‘gigantic steel hammer’ that smashes traditional institutions and traditional communities of faith.”<sup>146</sup> Other commentators call Modernity “a runaway juggernaut” and the “acid rain of spirit.”<sup>147</sup> These definitions of modernity are much darker and more frightening than either Erikson’s or McLaren’s lists of the presuppositions and fruits of Modernity. They suggest more than a mindset that needs to be overcome. Wells writes, “What shapes the modern world is not powerful minds but powerful forces, not philosophy but urbanization, capitalism, and technology. As the older quest for truth has collapsed, intellectual life has increasingly become little more than a gloss on the processes of modernization.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Os Guinness, “Mission in the Face of Modernity,” 89. For a broad overview of this revolution see Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006).

<sup>145</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 78.

<sup>146</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 91.

<sup>147</sup> Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 43.

<sup>148</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 62.

For the Christian, both Guinness and Wells suggest what is needed is something more akin to spiritual warfare.<sup>149</sup> The preacher who determines to be faithful to his charge to bring Good News to his culture must know both the enemy to be fought and the lay of the land upon which the battle is to be waged, in order to bring a message that has authority, integrity, and clearly promises to provide the answer to humanity's deepest need. This challenge is particularly important to consider since conventional wisdom has predicted that one of the concomitants of the ensuing uni-culture of Modernity is a reduction or decrease of religiosity within the social construct. Thankfully, this decrease has not been the experience in the United States. Individuals still seek to be individuals with their own thoughts, ideas and identities, and religion and spirituality thrive. In fact, "evidence that we are now in a bull market for spirituality is everywhere." It is evidenced by the burgeoning interest in angels, life after death, the "embracing light," and supernatural phenomenon upon which both books and movies have capitalized.<sup>150</sup> Modernity has not replaced religion and spirituality, it has, like the Midianites of old did to the Israelites, driven the faithful into the caves and dens of privatized belief and practice (see Judges 6:1-5).

The condition that is responsible for this anomaly is the compartmentalization of the spheres of public and private, encouraged by the growing urbanization of American life. In America, cities have become places where we go to work more than they are places where we live. Wells says that the inhabitants of these two competing spheres must learn to be amphibious, fitting in and moving comfortably

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<sup>149</sup> See Appendix 3 Spiritual Warfare.

<sup>150</sup> David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover its Moral Vision*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 193-194.

between the two. Os Guinness has written that there is great “potential for spiritual, moral and intellectual schizophrenia” for the cultural amphibian trying to live in differing worlds. But the amphibian of Guinness’ world is more like a chameleon who “is juggling with double, triple, and quadruple-living, modular morality and compartmentalized convictions.”<sup>151</sup>

Wells describes the tensions arising from the attempt to live in these multiple settings in *No Place for Truth*, where he calls them

‘sub-worlds’—in which we exist and through which we pass, perhaps even several times a day. These worlds all have their own values, their own cognitive horizons, their own reasons for and ways of doing things, their own class interests.... We move from the relationships and values of the family setting to an entirely different set of relationships and values in the workplace, from professional friends to whom we relate in one kind of way to personal friends to whom we relate in another, from service organizations to the larger business and bureaucratic structures in society that we must inhabit at least informationally and psychologically, from the catastrophes and crises beamed into our consciousness each evening by the TV news programs to the soft-pedaled amusements and hard-core pornography served up by the entertainment industry. Then we go to church. And lying across these worlds, sometimes identifying with them, and sometimes disengaging from them, are the further subcultures associated with age, ethnic background, class interest, and occupation. To move in these multiple worlds smoothly, we have to master the many languages of survival. Not many will be able to surmount this cultural diversity without considerable cognitive dissonance.... There was a time when both society and religion were held together by centripetal forces, but now each is being pulled apart by centrifugal forces, and this is significantly affecting the way in which we see our world.<sup>152</sup>

The attempt to live in two worlds also makes this amphibious inhabitant anonymous to most of the people who live with him in his two or more spheres. The goals of the public world are work, efficiency, and production; whereas, the values of this same world are not necessarily moral or religious. The anonymous amphibian is free to determine and invent his or her own personal worldview and religious system

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<sup>151</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 81.

<sup>152</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 82.



for each sphere, without accountability to the wider community; and people do. When these various people with their varieties of personal worldviews come into contact with one another, pluralism and friendly tolerance are necessary to reduce antagonism and conflict within the close quarters of the urban work-world. Unhappily for the cause of religious and moral values, this friendliness causes “all absolutes [to] perish either for lack of interest or because of the demands of the social etiquette.”<sup>153</sup>

The human cost of the anchorless morality of Modernity is a heightened anxiety and inability to deal with the onslaughts of uncertainties and threats of constant and unpredictable change. Because the modernist has little connection or loyalty to the bonds of the private world of others, and he has little need to know or care about others within the public world, a “raging narcissism ensues leaving people unfulfilled and lonely.”<sup>154</sup> One of the ironies of seeking to live in an anonymous public world with a private faith is that one will increasingly seek to be or express their real self within the sanctuary of the private sphere where the real self makes little or no difference. But, Guinness asks, how real is a self that doesn’t live in the real world?<sup>155</sup> This segmented world is the reality of Modernity.

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<sup>153</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 75.

<sup>154</sup> Wells, *Losing our Virtue*, 193.

<sup>155</sup> Os Guinness wrote with great prescience in *The Gravedigger File*, that “most modern people experience the private sphere as an island where the ‘real self’ lives. Under the Impact of the microchip revolution, this feeling can only grow. Home information centers...will dramatically increase the range of activities which people can attempt and achieve without ever leaving the private world of the so-called electronic cottage. It is interesting, isn’t it, that the ‘real self’ doesn’t live in the ‘real world.’ 75; What would he say now of the ubiquitous influence and availability of alternative worlds and experiences via the internet?

### **The Third Paradigm: The Age of Mission**

While many may succumb to the temptation to describe the transition from Modernity to Postmodernity here, it may be more helpful from a missiological standpoint to consider a description of what is coming or replacing Mead's second paradigm, the Christendom paradigm.<sup>156</sup> The Age of Christendom is over. The Age of Mission has come and Postmodernity is but a part of this Age.

There are broad features or characteristics of the Age of Mission that we must consider to set the stage for how true biblical and missional preaching needs to be pursued. These characteristics of the Age of Mission in the West are (1) Post-Christendom, (2) Post-Christian, (3) living with left-over influences of the Enlightenment and Modernity, (4) Postmodern, (5) pagan, and (6) therefore highly resistant to the Gospel.

### **The Age of Mission: Post Christendom**

Stuart Murray offers a "working definition" for Post-Christendom as "the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence."<sup>157</sup> This definition

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<sup>156</sup> One helpful way to describe the third paradigm, the Age of Mission, is to use the identifiable aspects of what David Wells calls *Our Time*. Wells has written five seminal volumes outlining *Our Time* as an era that has lost its concern for truth, its ability to think carefully and theologically, has relegated God to the sphere of weightlessness, has replaced character with personality, morals with values, focuses fully on the self and its desires, and has allowed individuals to see themselves as victims of external forces without personal responsibility. See David Wells, *No Place for Truth, Or Whatever happened to Evangelical Theology?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); *Losing Our Virtue, Why the Church must Recover its Moral Vision*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); *The Courage to be Protestant, Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>157</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 19.

follows a list of what Murray says Post-Christendom is not. First he writes that<sup>158</sup> Post-Christendom does not comprehensively describe the culture that will replace Christendom. We know that there is change in the air and we feel the cultural turbulence, into a new unknown and so we might use “post” as a humble admission that we do not know what is yet to come. Second, Post-Christendom does not mean post-Christian, even though the West is seeing drastically reduced numbers of participants in formal weekly Christian religious activities. However, Post-Christendom does not need to become Post-Christian in the sense that Christianity ceases to exist.<sup>159</sup> Murray’s hope is that a new, more vibrant, and biblically true Christianity will emerge from the “ruins of Christendom [offering] tremendous opportunities for telling and living out the Christian story in a society where [the story] is largely unknown.”<sup>160</sup> Third, Murray says that “Post-Christendom is not the same as pre-Christendom.” Yes, there are similarities to the pre-Christendom era we discover in the New Testament and the experiences of the Ante-Nicene Fathers; but the vestiges and memories of Christianity tainted by its flirtation and marriage to Constantinianism will long be scattered across Post-Christendom. “Even when the obvious anachronisms are removed (with or without the Church’s approval) its Christendom past will haunt post-Christendom.”<sup>161</sup> Fourth, to use the term Post-Christendom does not mean that we entered into a completely secular society in the West. The “confident assertions [over the past forty years] about the emergence of a

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<sup>158</sup> What follows is distilled from Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 4-18.

<sup>159</sup> I will show later that Francis Schaeffer was able to use the term Post-Christian as a cessation or the demise of Christianity—it is doubtful that many do use it in this sense.

<sup>160</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 8. This new era of opportunity is what I am calling the Age of Mission. The frontier of mission is always a place of excitement and opportunity even when it is threatening and dark with the unknown.

<sup>161</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 9.

secular culture now seem strangely dated.”<sup>162</sup> The emerging era will be highly secular; but at the same time, both spirituality and a remarkable diversity of religious beliefs and expressions are so flourishing that it is possible now to speak of a process of de-secularization.<sup>163</sup>

The fifth point of Murray’s definition is very important in this discussion. He encourages us to understand that even though the philosophical construct of the present age, is post-modernism, Post-Christendom and postmodernism are not the same. Post-Christendom is a culture shift that is due to the loss of the church’s influence enjoyed in the previous cultural milieu. This loss of influence may be seen as either a cause or a consequence of the inroads of rising Postmodernity, but the two are not to be understood as equal. Lastly, Murray says that the era of Post Christendom will not be the experience of all Christians. There are societies and cultures where the church exists that have not been as heavily affected or sedated by the Constantinian paradigm. These indigenous churches will face the challenges of the movement from Modernity into whatever will follow in their locale, but moving from the safety of or identification with Christendom will not be one of them.<sup>164</sup> But for most of the West what has been known as the Christendom paradigm is coming or has come to a close.

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<sup>162</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Murray is quick to admit that the “renewed interest in spirituality is generally not related to Christianity,” however he does see that the resurgent spirituality does offer new hopes for the future of the gospel. *Post-Christendom*, 12.

<sup>164</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 16. We are presently seeing examples of indigenous churches growing up without a memory of state sanction and/or protection. These churches are also growing in a context that is free from the taint of the admixture of Christianity and Western culture that came so easily and naturally with the combination of missions and Western imperialism of the nineteenth century. The underground Church in China has grown with what Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 18, calls the “Apostolic Genius.” The Church in much of Africa is growing not as the stepchild of white European Christianity and the Evangelical Churches in South America, although growing in a “Christianized” context are emerging in the culture whose Christendom history is one of bigotry and persecution by the Roman Catholic Church.

This agrees with Loren Mead's assessment that the definable borders of Christendom are a thing of the past and suggests that the Church in the West is today much closer to the Apostolic Paradigm than anything it has encountered since the conversion of Constantine. However, the Christendom idea continues to have a significant influence in our North American psyche, lingering in the public square as civil religion.<sup>165</sup> The memory of Christianity and the myth of the United States as a Christian nation, coupled with the human need for the transcendence provided by religion, keep the fire of this American civil religion smoldering just enough to be brought out when it is deemed necessary for ceremony. For the rest of the time, Christianity is shuttered into compartments of privatization far away and safely from the public view. Few people expect and many would not think of allowing one's Christianity to play any larger part in public life. Religious practice is, instead, required by the culture to be transferred from the public arena into the private spheres of congregation, home, and heart. The borders of Christendom are broken down; it has collapsed in on itself, and the church suddenly finds itself forced to operate in a new Paradigm. Once again the Church lives right up against the frontier borders of and is completely surrounded by a mission field. While this mission field is sometimes hostile, it is more often merely apathetic, due to its ignorance of the claims of the Church. Stuart Murray writes from his perspective as a Briton:

In Western culture, until recently, the story [the Christian message] was known and the church was a familiar institution. Evangelism meant encouraging those who already knew the story to live by it and inviting those already familiar with

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<sup>165</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 26. "The problem with civil religion, whether of the right or the left, is that it tends to be civil in the sense that it is inoffensive. It has no edges because it is driven not by a passion for God's truth but by the politics of the day, whatever those politics may be. Without God's truth, without his word as its center, a civil religion also forfeits his grace and his judgment—and without these, it has no means to survive in the modern world."

church to participate actively. Many were 'de-churched,' but hardly anyone was 'unchurched' (neither term is appropriate in a post-Christendom culture where church is marginal and abnormal, but they help us understand the transitional phase we are experiencing). But our culture is changing. Adult churchgoing continues to decline and only four percent of children are involved in churches. Ignorance of Christianity is increasing and church buildings are becoming as alien as mosques or gurudwaras. Some residual knowledge and belief will persist, though this will become attenuated and syncretistic, and church buildings will still provide vital community space. But we will no longer be able to assume we are in a 'Christian society' where most are latent Christians and lapsed churchgoers.<sup>166</sup>

It is at this point that Loren Mead's analysis of the culture and church in *The Once and Future Church* becomes less helpful. While he does summarize the changes in the life of the Church that have brought us to this new reality for ministry, his suggestions for how the church can live in and change itself in order to engage this new cultural reality still come out of the mindset of Christendom as though Christendom can, or should, be salvaged or reconstructed. Without probing deeper into some specific aspects of the assumptions and presuppositions that control the behavior of the people who live in this new mission field, Mead sees the response of the church to its new situation in terms of new structures, new flexibility, new freedom for the laity, and a deeper spirituality for every one<sup>167</sup> He says nothing of how the content of the church's message may have been contaminated by the Christendom mindset, or how that message itself needs to be cleansed from that

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<sup>166</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 2-3. We read similarly in American author Kenyon Callahan, *Preaching Grace*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), "We are now working with people who have never been part of a church, so how can we expect to get them to 'come back'?" The largest population in this country is the population of the unchurched. The largest denomination on the planet is the denomination of the unchurched. Welcome to an age of mission." 7-8.

<sup>167</sup> These themes are pursued and expanded in Loren Mead, *Five Challenges for the Once and Future Church*, (New York: Alban Institute, 1996).

contamination<sup>168</sup> and newly re-communicated in the Age of Mission. What is missing from Mead's analysis is that the church cannot continue to think of itself as a part of the Christendom or Constantinian Paradigm. It cannot continue to try and restructure or retool itself as a new kind of established church (whether emergent, seeker-driven, liturgical, a corporate church, cell church, or some sort of hip postmodern church). The church must change the fundamental and core understanding of who it is, so that it can begin to do what it needs to do. This change is particularly important in the face of the changing culture and its impatience with the organized church, its distrust of the organized church, and its conviction that the organized church is irrelevant. Alan Hirsch offers a serious warning in *The Forgotten Ways* when he considers the present and future of the church in a Post-Christendom context:

I have to confess that I do not think that the inherited formulas will work anymore. And what is more, I know I am not alone in this view. There is a massive roaming of the mind going on in our day as the search for alternatives heats up. However, the new thinking as it relates to the future of Christianity in the West only highlights our dilemma and generally proposes solutions that are little more than revisions of past approaches and techniques. Even much of the thinking about the so-called emerging church leaves the prevailing assumptions of church and mission intact and simply focuses on the issue of theology and spirituality in a postmodern setting.... In my opinion this will not be enough to get us through. As we gaze anxiously into the future and delve back into our history and traditions to retrieve missiological tools from the Christendom toolbox, many of us are left with the sinking feeling that this is simply not going to work. The tools and techniques that fitted previous eras of Western history simply don't seem to work any longer. What we need now is a new set of tools.<sup>169</sup>

Some may be frightened by the unfamiliarity of the Age of Mission. There ought to be a sense of welcome in the Church for this Age as it understands this new paradigm as a field of mission encounter with new and exciting vistas of opportunity.

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<sup>168</sup> Brian McLaren's character Dan says, "I can't get the thought out of my mind that our modern version of Christianity may have been so shaped by modernity's pressures as to be severely deformed, distorted. But we can't even see it." *A New Kind of Christian*, 27.

<sup>169</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 16-17.

It is a time for the Church to seek anew proper and biblical ways to carry out its original marching orders.

### **The Age of Mission: Post-Christian**

The second broad description of the Age of Mission is that it is Post-Christian. This is a phrase Francis A. Schaefer used in the 1960s and 1970s. In his works the Post-Christian world is primarily the Western world that has been molded by enlightenment thinking that teaches that there is no personal God “there,” and that the universe and all it contains is an ongoing evolutionary result of the impersonal plus time plus chance operating within a closed system. Practically this means that since there is no God “there” he cannot and does not interact or intersect with the unfolding universe. Further Schaeffer taught that Man within this impersonal and God-silent world has been reduced to a machine within the Machine that is the universe. This reduction has rendered Man to be a meaningless, insignificant zero, alienated from creator, others, and self—and incredibly lonely. The Post-Christian era of Francis Schaeffer is one devoid of absolute and propositional truth. It is a world that has turned its back on and rejected not only propositional truth statements but the concept of an absolute truth that stands behind those truth statements. He says that Man in the Post-Christian world has said farewell to truth that is reflected or defined by thesis and antithesis and accepts that all knowledge (and therefore, truth) is, like the world, evolving through synthesis.<sup>170</sup> The Post-Christian world is a world that needs truth to be told, but told with integrity and love. It is a world inhabited by

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<sup>170</sup> Schaeffer explains and revisits these themes in several places. Two very helpful books are *Death in the City*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1969), and *The Church at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1970, 1971, 1994), The material that follows summarizes his thought in these books and others.



people weary of truth manipulation, plasticity and hypocrisy. To reach these people, Schaeffer says there must be truth proclamation *and* truth practice. His primary idea of truth practice is a Christianity that works itself out in society in honest compassion and love. Schaeffer does not naively assume that the West was ever a Christian culture in the sense that even a majority of its people were true Christians, but he does believe that the cornerstone and pillars of Western society—that against which the Enlightenment railed<sup>171</sup>—was Christianity. What makes this present era Post-Christian is that the cornerstone has been removed and the pillars toppled. There are no longer the Biblical and Christian presuppositions upon which Western culture was built in the Middle Ages, continued into the Renaissance, and birthed the Reformation. The application of reason and common sense to these presuppositions during the Enlightenment shattered both cornerstone and pillars and left a dust-bowl of unbelief swirling with doubt, meaninglessness, and a darkness darker than any in the so-called dark ages.<sup>172</sup>

### **The Age of Mission: Living with Left-over's from the Enlightenment and Modernity**

Even though the Age of Mission is an era that is both beyond the pale of Christendom and increasingly Post-Christian and is most often called postmodern, it

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<sup>171</sup> Recall David Hume's statement that grouped "Stupidity, Christianity & Ignorance" together. footnote 119, page 38.

<sup>172</sup> See Edwin S. Gaustad, *Sworn on the Altar of God, A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 16-41. In this section Gaustad shows how the presuppositions of the Enlightenment were used against the claims of Christianity by Jefferson and other early American thinkers. Jefferson held that Nature and Reason were both superior sources of life's truth than any supposed revelation from God. "Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven...", 27 "Miracle and prophecies might frighten us out of wits, might scare us to death, might induce us to lie, but they [can] never convince us of an absurdity that our Reason denied." 29; "The true destiny of Reason was to 'overturn the empire of superstition and erect upon its ruins a fabric against which the storms of [religious and civil] despotism may beat in vain.'" 31; The new dark ages that have come out of the Enlightenment are described by Charles Colson in *Against the Night, Living in the New Dark Ages*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1989).

is also still highly influenced by the ideals and value constructs of Modernity. It is perhaps for this reason that Brian McLaren seeks to use the prefix “post” to mean “flowing on from or coming after.”<sup>173</sup> While D. A. Carson points out that the dictionary defines post as something new that follows the old, McLaren stretches the definition of the term to mean both continuity and discontinuity. David Wells seems to agree with McLaren’s usage when he writes,

Throughout the West, is it now apparent that there is a major shift in mood and outlook taking place. It is doubtful whether this shift is deep enough, and decisive enough, to have established a clean breach with modernity and hence to inaugurate a new cultural phase we can call *Postmodernity*, even though I do use the word. Harvey has concluded, I believe with justification, ‘that there is much more continuity than difference between the broad history of modernism and the movement of postmodernism.’<sup>174</sup>

The characteristics of Modernity which are echoed in the present are: (1) a commitment to change, choice, and the belief that progress and change are always good and desirable, (2) materialism, (3) secularism, (4) anti-authoritarianism, (5) a commitment to individualism, (6) the triumph of the therapeutic, (7) disappearance of sin as a moral category, (8) consumerism, (9) the idolatry of the self and self esteem, (10) privatization of that which is important in life.

Modernity has left westerners with a commitment to change, choice and a sense of the inexorable good of progress. There is no sense of the given-ness of things in Modernity. Os Guinness has written, “Choice and change are now the state of affairs.”<sup>175</sup> Never have people lived in a time of more rapid and massive change.

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<sup>173</sup> Quoted by Donald A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 28.

<sup>174</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 66-67.

<sup>175</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 180.

“Change is faster, deeper, and more pervasive than ever before”<sup>176</sup> and Modernity taught that change is good and always brings more good. Traditions are scuttled and the old is easily and quickly replaced by the new and improved.<sup>177</sup> Those who want to hold onto tradition find that “no longer is there anything automatic or assured about tradition, [and] to be conservative is to be self-consciously defensive. The result is a new nervousness and anger. Genuine conservatism in a fast-changing world is a threatened species, and the aggressiveness with which it defends itself betrays its underlying insecurity.”<sup>178</sup> This commitment forces modern conservatives—especially Christians—into a vicious quandary. To fight for tradition they must use the weapons of modernity and find themselves in a double bind. They must sup with the devil, but the long spoon is in short supply. They will resist change to the death, but in the struggle for tradition not a single feature of the familiar world will be left unchanged.<sup>179</sup>

Modernity has also left a cultural commitment to philosophic materialism and naturalism. Both Materialism and Naturalism are defined as the rejection of the supernatural whether in the sense of origins and creation and Providence, or the ongoing interaction of Deity with creation and human lives. Matter and reality are limited to what we experience with our senses (empiricism) and judge with our minds (rationalism) without appealing to external sources of revelation or explanation. The Materialist and Naturalist live in a closed universe without either

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<sup>176</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 34.

<sup>177</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 4.

<sup>178</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 180.

<sup>179</sup> This phrase which is explained Os Guinness *Dining with the Devil*, “comes from the Christian social scientist, Peter Berger, a renowned analyst of modernity” 31.

the intervention or interruption of God. Speaking of the use of materialistic reason Guinness writes,

...what was formerly left to God or human initiative or the processes of nature is classified, calculated and controlled by the use of reason. This is not a matter of philosophical rationalism but of functional rationality. In other words, reason used for practical rather than theoretical ends; reason as the servant of technology and development rather than of theology and philosophy.... Under the regimental control of reason and technique, wisdom has been reduced to know how, fruitfulness to skill, and an arduous apprenticeship under a master to a breezy weekend seminar from an expert... as the controlling hand of practical reason stretches further and further, all the 'magic and mystery' of life are reduced and removed. When reason has harnessed all the facts, figures and forces, divine intervention is as unwelcome as accident, divine law as antiquated as the divine right of kings. Human spontaneity becomes 'the human factor,' the weak link in the chain of procedures. Wonder, along with humility and notions about the sanctity of things, is totally out of place. Problem solving, twentieth-century style, is a matter of working Rubik's cube rather than unlocking the riddle of the universe....The problem for the Christian in the modern world is not that practical reason is irreligious, but that in more and more areas of life religion is practically irrelevant. Total indifference to religion [and God] is characteristic...of modern life...and all...spiritual life...is dead, stunted or deformed.<sup>180</sup>

Whereas Deism merely denied God's present activity in the world, the Naturalism of Modernity seeks to deny the existence of God and limits all being to matter—the material. The Bible, however, teaches that we live in and deal with a spiritual realm. There is much we cannot experience with our senses; there is much we cannot understand with our common sense or explain by mere use of Reason. In fact in many cases our senses are only mere pointers to the realities that confront us.

The third leftover from Modernity is a commitment to the secular and secularism. Secularity is seeking to live life without God, or as though God is not important.<sup>181</sup> During the Enlightenment Project and into Modernity, a process, starting at the center of society with the academics and intelligentsia (the

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<sup>180</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 61-63.

<sup>181</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 55ff.

*philosophes*) began in which successive sectors of society left behind and were set free from the “decisive influence of religious ideas and institutions.” In this process “of neutralizing the social and cultural influence in the central areas of modern society, such as the worlds of science, technology, bureaucracy, and so on, religious ideas became less meaningful and religious institutions more marginal.”<sup>182</sup> It is inaccurate to think of Secularization as a philosophy or even an agenda. It is rather a process of societal and institutional change. Because modernity is a combination of technology, urbanization, and progress, secularization needs not be based on an intellectual concept, “but it is a mentality that rubs off on people, is contagious and becomes a part of them as modernization grows.”<sup>183</sup> Secularization is not an attack only on Christianity, “but its effect is on all religions and religious belief....Secularization is not a matter of removing Christianity or religion but it has the effect of reducing the influence of Christianity in particular and religion in general. When Christianity loses its effect on central aspects of persons’ lives, what remains will be inconsequential and lack the ‘moral muscle’ to resist evil.”<sup>184</sup> Moving out of modernity into the Age of Mission finds people living as though no reality other than the material impinges upon them. Whereas, in Christendom religious faith reigned as an integral part of daily life—everything was affected by it. Life was seen as a part of a wider larger reality that was “held to be religious, sacred, other, or transcendent...”<sup>185</sup> Ordinary life was defined or counter defined by this extra-ordinary reality. Life was seen in relationship to the ‘other:’

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<sup>182</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 55.

<sup>183</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 55.

<sup>184</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 54-55.

<sup>185</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 56.

Secularization has changed all that. Today, for some all of the time, and for most people some of the time, secularization ensures that ordinary reality is not just the official reality, but the only reality... Human life has traditionally been lived in a house with windows to other worlds. These windows may have sometimes become dirty, broken or boarded up, but they were always there. Only in the modern world have we achieved what has been called 'a world without windows.' Shut off from transcendence modern people are shut up to triviality."<sup>186</sup>

A generation ago the great fear of secularism was its seemingly unstoppable advance and the threat of its absolute victory over all realms of life. David Wells has shown that secular humanism did not win in the sense that all religion has been erased from our society. What has happened, however, is a further and deeper separation between personal faith issues and public life. Culture continues to demand and individuals acquiesce to the continued privatization and compartmentalization of faith away from the public arena.<sup>187</sup> The tension for the Christian and the witness of Christianity is that the Bible teaches that all of life is under the authority and superintendence of God and is to be lived in the consciousness of his presence, for his glory, and by his enabling. Jesus warned his disciples that a lamp is not to be hidden under a basket of a privatized faith bowing to a secularized society.

The Enlightenment project demanded freedom for all and especially freedom from God and any suggestion of divinely constituted or delegated authority. The world in transition from Modernity has held on to that promise of freedom. This demand for freedom is the basis for both the relativism and tolerance that have become hallmarks of our culture. Even more so this demand for freedom has become

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<sup>186</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 57. Guinness takes this phrase "world without windows" from Peter L. Berger and Richard Newhouse, ed., *Against the World, For the World* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 10.

<sup>187</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 186-187.

the basis of an anti-authoritarian bent in the culture. When the Enlightenment demanded freedom from all systems of thought that threatened to limit its ability for speculation and innovation, it also needed to “resolutely [oppose] all ideas rooted in what was eternal, fixed, and unchanging.”<sup>188</sup> The result of this insistence on freedom was a rejection of any law outside of the individual himself. “The modern personality is built on the idea of freedom, of being liberated from all beliefs, from all expected behavior, from all ethical norms, from the past, and from God as something other than the self. This emancipated self is a law unto itself. Indeed, in the way it actually functions, this self assumes that it is authoritative over God and the church.”<sup>189</sup> This enthronement of the self must then reject every other claimant to the throne of one’s life. How can there be freedom if there is an outside authority? Earlier arguments of whether ultimate authority is found in concepts of *Lex Rex* or *Rex Lex* are lost on those who live as though they each one have the power to declare as Louis XIV did, “*L’Etat c’est moi!*” Funeral directors bear out the victory of the anti-authoritarian self when they report that the most popular song requested for funerals is Frank Sinatra’s “I did it My Way.”<sup>190</sup> What we see is nothing less than the natural and logical consequence of man living according to the promise of the serpent in Genesis 3 who told the first man and woman that in rejecting God they would become like God—gods themselves. Gods do not need to bow the knee and

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<sup>188</sup> Wells, *Above all Earthly Pow’rs*, 29.

<sup>189</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 69.

<sup>190</sup> As reported on “Morning Edition” National Public Radio, WFCR, Amherst, MA July 18, 2008.

they have every right to reject any outside source of authority. Gone is the Biblical view that God, the creator, is King and that we are subjects.<sup>191</sup>

David Wells cites the *World Values Survey* (2003) which surveyed samples of 80 percent of the world's population. "It identified the trademark of modernity as an attitude that defies tradition, traditional authority, and insists on free self-expression....This kind of self-expression coalesces most often with what is secular and rationalistic. In other words, it partners with the older Enlightenment attitudes that were always resistant to religious restraints because they were always resistant to any authority outside the self."<sup>192</sup> There are some places where this is not true, such as older, strongly Roman Catholic countries and Islamic cultures. In spite of these variations, however, the bottom line is that the Enlightenment and Modernity have stamped Western culture with a strong trait of antipathy to any external authority—especially religious authority.<sup>193</sup>

Runaway individualism is next on the list of cultural characteristics that are left over from the era of Modernity shown in the self-centeredness and me-ism of the age. The autonomous self says, "I choose, I decide, I determine. Life is lived by me, for me." The individualism left over from Modernity is not the same as the legendary or mythical rugged individualist of American lore. That individualism meant that "people took responsibility for themselves. They did so out of duty. They felt some sense of accountability, if not to God, then at least to some moral principles

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<sup>191</sup> Predating Frank Sinatra by 200 years were these words by "the poet of the American Revolution, Philip Frenau, "who wrote: "What human power shall dare to bind/The mere opinions of the mind?/ Must man at that tribunal bow/Which will no range to thought allow,/But his best powers would sway or sink,/And idly tells him what to THINK." Gaustad, *Sworn at the Altar of God*, 30.

<sup>192</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 157.

<sup>193</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 157.



or their community, or their family.”<sup>194</sup> This sense of accountability and connection with the wider community gave the individual a set of boundaries for both action and belief. Peter L. Berger names these boundaries the “plausibility structure of a culture.”<sup>195</sup> The plausibility structure is a combination of culture, traditions, and common agreement within the society as regarding what is and is not acceptable and believable. The old individualism still operated within this plausibility structure. The new individualism coming out of Modernity is one where the autonomous human heart is in the center—with total freedom of choice. There is nothing within the culture, no baseline, no plausibility structure that is accepted as given, which the individual must accept as the starting point for his morals, ethics, and behavior. The new individual is cut loose from “place and community, from clan and family, and sent off to drift on a mighty ocean amidst all of its storms, storms of violence which technology has sometimes made possible and storms of loneliness and meaninglessness, with no shore points in view. If the old social order was held together by the bonds of kin and custom, here social relations are stabilized all too often only by fleeting sexual encounters.”<sup>196</sup> Wells calls this loneliness the modern plague. The new individual is disconnected, not belonging anywhere in particular but to everything in general. The autonomous self has become the individual afflicted with “being alone, of being unnoticed, of being carried along by an indifferent universe. Commitment—actual commitment, real bonds, a real sense of belonging, not just the *idea* of commitment—has become a precious stone, rare,

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<sup>194</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 157, 136, 206.

<sup>195</sup> This concept is discussed by Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 10-14.

<sup>196</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 28.

much sought after and, when found, treasured.”<sup>197</sup> How different this new individual is from the norm of the Scriptural community where God is at the center and all others are to be more important to me than I am to myself. The self-centeredness of the autonomous self is nothing less than pride, and pride is condemned in the Scripture.

The individual in Modernity *is* connected to and committed to is his or her own self. The self has needs, hurts, and deficiencies that cry out to be met, healed and filled. But the autonomous self has nowhere to go for its fulfillment. Sin as a category is gone because God as the standard is gone. Soul cure has become self-cure. The practitioners of self cure are the psychologists, both professional and pop who “work out evermore affirming and uplifting therapies,”<sup>198</sup> who promise to cure or at least keep on trying until some progress toward the cure is felt. We have now seen what author Philip Rieff has called the “triumph of the therapeutic.”<sup>199</sup> The new individual does not seek to relate or conform to the world but instead seeks to change personal behavior in such a way that that feelings and felt needs deep inside are soothed and even coddled. Psychology has become not a method of ministering to the troubled self but a methodology that seeks to alleviate the unpleasant—including guilt and shame—from the self.<sup>200</sup> Gone with sin as a category are the Biblical necessities of repentance, conversion and restoration of one’s relationship with God. The quest for change is within, the outside God does not enter in, nor is he needed. The closed universe of the Enlightenment naturally gives birth to the closed box self

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<sup>197</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 33.

<sup>198</sup> Wells, *Losing our Virtue*, 128.

<sup>199</sup> Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic, Uses of Faith after Freud*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

<sup>200</sup> Wells, *Losing our Virtue*, 128.

of Modernity. Self-cure is the new answer for the new autonomous self, the new individual.

Modernity was fueled by production and consumption of consumer goods. That consumerism still thrives today, even as Modernity fades in the West. Modernity with its constant search for progress, increase of knowledge, better products, and a more comfortable lifestyle continually called for and presented the consumer with a wide array of new products. We have been taught that life is not well-lived without a constant influence of the latest and greatest. David Wells says, "Our context today...in the West is principally one of commerce and consumption. To speak the language of consumption is to speak contextually. It is to speak the language everyone understands. It is to enter the culture and mind-set of twenty-first-century Westerners. It is to meet them on their own terms, incarnationally, just as Jesus met the people of his own day. That is the logic."<sup>201</sup> Alan Hirsch provides a good overview of consumerism in *The Forgotten Ways* where he writes of the excessive influences of the global market that completely pervades our lives:

Under the excessive influence of the market, experiences, indeed life itself, tends to become commodified. In such an economy, people are viewed as mere consumptive units. The suburbs all orbit around the central consumerist temple called The Shopping mall. Teenagers walk aimlessly up and down the soulless corridors as if looking for an answer that somehow evades them in the windows. Their parents saunter through the same malls indulging in a dose of 'retail therapy.' Disneyland, cruise vacations, extreme sports, drugs, and the like are consumable experiences.<sup>202</sup>

It is not only production goods that are presented to consumers. Consumers are offered new identities that can be changed as easily as a new set of clothes. The

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<sup>201</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 50.

<sup>202</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 109.

new identity is assumed “by moving into the groovier inner city, or by dropping out and becoming feral, changing our clothes, changing our friends and looking around for new ones, or buying this of that product that identifies us with new more desirable networks of people.”<sup>203</sup> The Church needs also to realize that it is a victim of this consumerist mindset. Worshippers shop for new churches in the same way that they look for cars, houses, electronic gadgets, and schools. They seek a church that will meet their needs and desire for ecstatic worship, religious services for their family, business and social contacts, and theological comfort. Hirsch writes, “in dealing with consumerism we are dealing with an exceedingly powerful enemy...that must be dealt with if we are going to be effective in the twenty-first century West.”<sup>204</sup>

One of the continual challenges of living Christianly in the world, whether in Christendom or in Modernity is that faith is always being pushed out of the realm of the public into the closets of the personal and private world. Privatized faith lives in the shadow of secularized society dominated by reason and the experiences of a million autonomous selves all demanding an equal voice. Os Guinness has defined Privatization as “the process by which modernization produces a cleavage between the public and private spheres of life and focuses on the private sphere as the special arena for the expansion of individual freedom and fulfillment” making Christianity in our culture “privately engaging, socially irrelevant”<sup>205</sup> One’s faith is relegated to the private sector of one’s life without being expected to make a public life impact or to be visible in the public part of life. The public arena of life is

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<sup>203</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 109.

<sup>204</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 109.

<sup>205</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 74, 80 see also Os Guinness, “Mission in the Face of Modernity,” in *The Gospel in the Modern World, A Tribute to John Stott*, ed. Martyn Eden and David F. Wells (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 96.

a sort of 'no go' area where the rule and relevance of religion are strictly excluded even for the most religious people...because of the practical irrelevance of religion [there]. Religion in the no-go area is inadmissible, not because it is illegal but because it is considered inapplicable.... Christians have come to the tacit recognition that the central sectors of society are outside the sphere of influence of religion.<sup>206</sup>

The challenge for the Biblical preacher is to show that spirituality is not fragmented into private and public spheres while at the same time steering clear of modern concepts of spirituality that take their cues from monism and the pantheistic worldview of Eastern religions. Evangelicals will also need to be aware that spirituality involves the whole person in his whole moment-by-moment life. Francis Schaeffer warned that over against this true biblical view some evangelicalism has been Platonic in the sense that too much emphasis has been put on the soul in contrast to the whole man, including the body and the intellect."<sup>207</sup> Not only is the life of man with God an everywhere and all-the-time-reality, it is a commitment of the whole person in relationship with God. As Os Guinness says of privatized Christians, "It's not that they aren't where they should be, but that *they aren't what they should be where they are.*"<sup>208</sup>

### **The Age of Mission and Postmodernity**

The fourth major characteristic of the Age of Mission is the advent of Postmodernity that Wells, because of its close connection to the features of Modernity calls *ultramodernism*.<sup>209</sup> James Sire says that "postmodernism isn't 'post' anything;

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<sup>206</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 65.

<sup>207</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968), 144.

<sup>208</sup> Guinness, *Gravedigger File*, 79-80.

<sup>209</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 67, J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 54, refer to Postmodernity as "Hypermodern."

it is the last move of the modern.”<sup>210</sup> Alan Hirsch calls the emergence of Postmodernity a shift “from solid modernity to liquid modernity.”<sup>211</sup> Much has been written trying to describe and understand this cultural sea change under the broad and often inaccurate heading of postmodernism in recent years from both a Christian and a secular perspective, far too much to make anything more than a cursory summary necessary here. Some authors have given a full treatment to the philosophical underpinnings and sociological outworkings of their understanding of postmodernism;<sup>212</sup> others have given a more simplistic and facile treatment using lists and comparisons rather than thoughtful and well-developed narrative.<sup>213</sup> What we can say is that by and large Postmodernity is disdainful and hateful towards Modernity and it rejects everything connected with it. “Postmodernism begins with many of the assumptions of modernism...but heads off in a different direction.

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<sup>210</sup> James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3d ed., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 174.

<sup>211</sup> Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 16.

<sup>212</sup> For example see Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996); and *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); see also all of the books by David F. Wells listed in footnote 156. Brian McLaren describes his understanding of Postmodernism in narrative fashion in his trilogy *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); *The Last Word and the Word After That: A Tale of Faith, Doubt, and a New Kind of Christian*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); and *The Church on the Other Side*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000); see also J. Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

<sup>213</sup> For example Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope, A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997) uses only four couplets to show how Postmodernism contrasts to Modernism: Truth→Preference; Autonomous Self→Community; Scientific→Virtual Reality; Human Progress→Human Misery; Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern Word*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), says that “ten distinctive can be given as hallmarks of postmodern people: (1) They’re reacting to modernity and all its tenets, (2) The reject objective truth, (3) They’re skeptical and suspicious of authority, (4) They’re like persons in search of a self and identity, (5) They’ve blurred morality and are into whatever’s expedient, (6) They continue to search for the transcendent, (7) They’re living in a media world unlike any other, (8) They’ll engage in the knowing smirk, (9) They’re on a quest for community, (10) They live in a very material world. Johnston unpacks these 10 tenets on pages 23-59.

Reacting against the worst evils of modernism, it turns around and devours the parent, refusing to recognize its own origins.”<sup>214</sup>

The aspects of cultural Postmodernity that seem to be most important for the preacher in the Age of Mission and will need to be addressed by Biblical Missional Preaching are:

1. The world of Postmodernity is a world filled with emptiness, pessimism and hopelessness in a search for meaning. This hopelessness is a carryover of the nihilistic impulse flowing from the thinking and writing of the existentialist philosophers in Modernity.
2. The postmodern world has sought to build its systems for discovering the meaning of life on a foundation of epistemological relativism and an outright rejection of any categories of the existence of absolute, certain, universal, and knowable truth.
3. The postmodern world remains committed to the autonomous self and the supremacy of the individual in making moral decisions and creating a plausible worldview. At the same time loneliness and the anonymity of the urbanization of Modernity drive these individualists into tribal communities.
4. The result of this relativism and individuality is a pluralistic society that is increasingly fragmented.
5. The Postmodernist rejects any and all attempts to live according to a comprehensive worldview or universalizing story [metanarrative].
6. The Postmodern seeking some sort of meaning, but not believing it can be found in modernist categories of truth, lives without an underlying foundation or an overarching story. Meaning and a sense of aliveness are sought through the experiential and irrational. And they are “Oh-so-spiritual.”

Postmodernism did not invent pessimism and the meaninglessness of life, this pessimism was inherited from the logical consequences of a fully applied naturalism that was Modernity. Still, Postmodernism has been called “pessimistic wistful thinking” and “nihilism with a smile.”<sup>215</sup> When Modernity exchanged unaided human reason for God, and the laws of nature for His revelation, its thinkers closed themselves into a box that did more than remove God from the equation and “put him

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<sup>214</sup> Carson, *Conversant*, 26.

<sup>215</sup> Gibb, *ChurchNext*, 23.

out of a job.”<sup>216</sup> The closed universe became a closed box, trapping Man into a system that left no room for true hope. The closed universe is a system that by denying any truth beyond that which can be empirically observed has proved itself to be incapable of accounting for the ultimate purpose for the universe, providing any basis for morality, and, most importantly for the present discussion, denies the significance and value of human beings and their existence. The closed universe became a dead end in the search for any answers regarding meaning. Not only were there no answers to the big questions, the closed universe failed to give answers for daily practical living. Nihilism grew naturally and logically out of the silence of the closed box universe. Douglas Groothuis says that Postmodernism is “in many ways, modernism gone to seed, carried to its logical conclusions.”<sup>217</sup> The plant that has grown from this seed of logical conclusions to become emptiness, meaninglessness, and nihilism of the postmodern condition can actually be traced to two sources; one outside the individual and the other from within. The external source of this emptiness comes from the success of Modernity’s drive to a secularized society. Secularized society is without both a moral foundation and a central core that can define meaning. When God was taken from the center and pushed to the margins of society, the ability for any confidence whatsoever in defining life followed Him. Descartes began his search for truth by seeking to find the one thing that he could

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<sup>216</sup> Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibnitz, Spinoza and the Fate of God in the Modern World*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006) 157-158 “The Scientific investigation of nature [Liebnitz and Spinoza] suspected, might one day unravel all the mysteries of the world. Miracles would dissolve into ignorance, and the cosmos in all its splendor would stand revealed as a grand, but ultimately self-sufficient machine. In this event, what would God do?” “The question for seventeenth century philosophers was not yet about the *existence* of God...but rather about the *function* of God. If science did eventually manage to explain all of nature in terms of mechanical principles, it seemed, then the providential, miracle-working God of old would be out of a job.”

<sup>217</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 40.



know for certain, that is, that he did not doubt. As we know, he settled on the thesis that he could not doubt his own existence. Descartes began with himself (Man) and with doubt. But hope does not come from within man; it certainly does not come from doubt. What began as a quest for freedom from God instead became freedom from the source of meaning. Rationality without theism can only come to pessimism. Man is, and knows he is, finite and “a finite has no meaning unless it has an infinite reference point.”<sup>218</sup> The Enlightenment sought to “create a society that was not controlled by the concerns and domination of the Church...within which plurality of opinions, ideas, and activities can compete.... But the end result of this process created a massive spiritual vacuum into which stepped an unprecedented host of cultural forces.”<sup>219</sup> Because there was no center in Modernity and because truth absolute and binding did not exist, Postmoderns “have abandoned the illusive search for truth” and have substituted it with a *c'est la vie* attitude that comes off with a flippant “whatever works for you.”<sup>220</sup> The reality is that postmodern man and woman have found that nothing without God works. Human beings created in the image of God for the purpose of reflecting the glory and grandeur of God back to the Creator and to the rest of creation cannot fulfill their purpose when God is on the periphery. He is not meant to shine into a life or add to a life but rather to be the life-light that shines out of one's life.

This brings us to the internal source of the emptiness within the postmodern condition: the logical conclusion of living with one's system of belief. Francis

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<sup>218</sup> Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 15, 22 “If we do not begin with a personal creator, eventually we are left (no matter how we string it out systematically) with the impersonal plus time plus chance.” This says, Schaeffer, is the beginning of pessimism and despair.

<sup>219</sup> Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 108.

<sup>220</sup> Gibb, *ChurchNext*, 23.

Schaeffer saw this clearly in the 1960s and desperately sought to make Christians aware of the missional challenge that was confronting the church. The thinking person who has accepted the presuppositions of the closed universe and life without God must, if they are going to live consistently with those presuppositions, soon realize that the life that closes God out becomes a prison, from which there is no exit. For Schaeffer the universe without a door to admit God was also a room devoid of windows to let in the light of God. Hence despair. No way for God to get in (if indeed there is a God) and no way to escape the consequences of life without God. Adding to the despair is the fact that Man cannot live consistently with atheistic and naturalist presuppositions. Or, as Schaeffer wrote in an appendix to *The God Who is There*,

*...in fact, no non-Christian can be consistent to the logic of his pre-suppositions. The reason for this is simply that a man must live in reality, and reality consists of two parts: the external world and its form, and man's 'mannishness', including his own 'mannishness'. No matter what a man may believe, he cannot change the reality of what is. As Christianity is the truth of what is there, to deny this, on the basis of another system, is to stray from the real world...Every man, therefore irrespective of his system, is caught. As he tries intellectually to extend his position in a logical way and then live within it, he is caught by two things which, as it were, slap him across the face...the external world with its structure, and those things which well up from inside himself. Non-Christian presuppositions simply do not fit into what God has made, including what man is.*<sup>221</sup>

Nancy Pearcey tells us that the postmodern dilemma comes from persons seeking to live as though there is no basis for ethics and morals because materialistic science has declared their basis nonexistent. But Man *knows* otherwise, because God created him with "eternity in his heart" and a moral baseline that still speaks to him when he breaks the law of God. The tension and the emptiness come from trying to

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<sup>221</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 121-122.

live as though what we know to be real (an ethical base) does not exist because the naturalist calls that innate reality *unreal*.<sup>222</sup>

In a secularized world there are no religious assumptions as foundations for the society. Having no agreement regarding what we believe, why we are, or where we are going to end, there is neither any agreement for how we act, why we act or even what we should do. The monolithic foundation of a quasi-universally held set of assumptions [metanarrative] gives way to the paving stone fragmentation of many mini-assumptions that are each given equal status on the thoroughfare of public discourse. Having a smaller and smaller place to stand, the believer (of any metanarrative or life-controlling set of assumptions or world-view) stands in isolated loneliness or is forced to hop from one presuppositional island to another. The imbalance that comes from this one legged hop-scotching and the fear of falling recalls the words of the cynical questioner in Psalm 11:3, who asks, “If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?” and, the contrasting confidence of the Psalmist who wrote, “you have set my feet on a rock.”(Ps 40:3)

Without an external plumb line of truth, each person is given the heady experience of developing their own truth—or truths, since we live in various worlds that require differing responses. Without an external plumb line, the postmodern man and woman each have the ability and freedom to declare their own truth as legitimate in the realm of personal behavior, while at the same time having the freedom to declare that no one else’s truth is any better or worse than their own. This relativistic pluralism has the unhappy result not of making every truth valuable, but

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<sup>222</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 107.

of making all truth claims equally worthless. How can the life-destroying cannibalism of Jeffrey Dahmer have as much intrinsic value as the life-giving sacrifice of an anonymous field worker for World Vision? Does it not destroy the meaning of her work on behalf of others to say that it has no more significance than the freedom that Dahmer lived?

Knowing the freedom to choose and the emptiness that comes from living that freedom, individuals seek to alleviate the loneliness of their radical individualism by joining with others who think, live, and look like them. The impersonality and anonymity of secularization and urbanization that Postmodernity has inherited from Modernity's doctrine of the supremacy of the autonomous self are untenable for the individual created in the image of God—whose very nature is tied up in the relational interaction of the Trinity.

It is not only radical individualism and the autonomous self that has brought loneliness and a drive toward community. The demise of the nuclear family, well-documented and lamented, has added to the yearning for relationship by “children of divorced parents, or children whose parents never married and then split or, perhaps never identified themselves...have a sense of hollowness, of not being rooted anywhere, of not belonging, or being free-floating.”<sup>223</sup> That churches have been quick to pick up on this yearning is shown by the growth of home fellowship groups in the recent decades. Even so, these home fellowship groups are often not really a part of the church but apart from the church as small independent groupings free from oversight, cut off from the sacraments, discipline, and commitment to the wider

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<sup>223</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 31.

Church.<sup>224</sup> Biblical preaching in the Age of Mission will need to speak to this longing for belonging in such a way that it will not allow the community of the church to be a gathering of hungry seekers each vying to have their needs met at the expense of or without regard to authentic Biblical, sacrificial fellowship.

Sadly, one of the results of the relativism, pluralism, and individualism of the age is a fragmented society made up of fragmented individuals. There is a sense that the world is spinning free from any external purposeful control. Wells says that for many it seems that life is unraveling. He answers his own question, “what is the real reason for this unraveling?” by pointing to the fact that “...our society no longer has a center of values that exert a centripetal force on our collective life....The disappearance of the center in both society and religion has produced an emptiness....The once whole-worlds of society and religion have broken apart into a host of smaller independent worlds, each of which has taken off on its own trajectory.”<sup>225</sup> These independent sub-worlds attempt to co-exist but find often that instead of tolerance they encounter antagonism and competition. “It is unlikely that such cultural diversity can be surmounted without considerable cognitive dissonance.” Fragmented individuals lacking a connecting point to the wider culture produce a society fraught with psychological confusion and anxiety.<sup>226</sup>

An additional piece of the postmodern pie is that is both a cause and is caused by this self-centered fragmentation is its thorough rejection of any grand, universal, defining story that explains and connects humans to one another and to the universe. The term metanarrative has commonly used to describe this grand, all-embracing

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<sup>224</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 31.

<sup>225</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 157.

<sup>226</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 157.

story that defines and holds a people or culture together. In our American experience elements of our metanarrative include divine and manifest destiny, the rugged individual, all men are created equal, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and a considerable allegiance to the concept of a Christian nation. However, the contention of postmodernism articulated by Francois Lyotard and others is at the very least incredulity toward all claimed metanarratives and more often a full blown rejection of their existence or validity.<sup>227</sup> But why is this so? One reason is that Modernity gave so much weight to naturalistic and rationalistic empiricism that former metanarratives claiming divine intervention, national election, and purpose could not be sustained. If God or divine revelation is taken out of the equation, we are left with an unsubstantiated and unsustainable story. Unprovable by reason, one metanarrative becomes equally as compelling as another. The Biblical account of origins has no more credibility or claim on people than the animist myths from the jungles of Papua New Guinea. Stripped of authority, reduced to myth, these stories lost power in Modernity and have been rejected by postmoderns.<sup>228</sup> We now see the rejection of the old story, the new story, and all other stories that might seek to claim universality. Alan Hirsch offers insights about the diminishing power of the metanarrative and the rise of sub-worlds from his work as a missional pastor in Australia:

With the breakup of the modern period and the subsequent postmodern period, things have begun to radically change. For one, the power of hegemonic ideologies have come to an end, and with that the breakdown of the power of the state...and other forms of 'grand stories' that bind societies or groups together in a

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<sup>227</sup> This is an oft-repeated descriptor of Postmodernity. This material is taken from Thomas Hobson, "Rethinking Postmodern theology," *Modern Church and Believing Society* 47:3 (July 2006) 10-11.

<sup>228</sup> See Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 44-47.

grand vision. The net effect of this has been the resultant flourishing of subcultures, and what sociologists call the *heterogenization*, or simply *tribalism*, of Western Culture....[A] new tribalism was born in the postmodern era....People now identify themselves less by grand ideologies, national identities, or political allegiances, and by much less grand stories: those of interest groups, new religious movements (New Age), sexual identity (gays, lesbians, transsexuals, etc.), sports activities, competing ideologies, (Neo-marxist, neo-fascist, eco-rats, etc.) class, conspicuous consumption (metrosexuals, urban grunge, etc.), work types (Computer geeks, hackers, designers, etc.), and so forth. On one occasion some youth ministry specialists I work with identified in an hour fifty discernible youth *subcultures*...alone. Each of them takes their subcultural identity with utmost seriousness...<sup>229</sup>

The second reason that the postmodernist rejects the metanarrative is the growth and acceptance of new theories of language, words, and their uses. In the beginning these language theories following Ludwig Wittengenstein's work pointed to the "rules" of language and word usage within a specific culture. Culture here can be defined as both<sup>230</sup> large (nations) and small (families, clubs, and professional groups) groupings of people. The meanings of words, according to the syntax and grammar of the culture, are all fluid and often more symbolic than literal. Eventually these theories of the "language games" morphed into claims that language and stories are always used to promote violence, oppression and persecution. Language and words are less games than they are power plays. Because words are powerful, Michael Foucault would say that when used they can become weapons and are often used as such. For this reason stories and metanarratives being intentional language use are viewed with great suspicion from the perspective of the oppressed.

An additional, and very important, aspect of philosophic Postmodernity is its view of knowledge and truth. One might ask which comes first, the rejection of the

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<sup>229</sup> Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 61.

<sup>230</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 387-438.

universal story which claims to be true, or the rejection of the existence of truth upon which the universal story is based. Postmodernity has rejected a comprehensive and binding worldview based both on a commitment to the non-existence of absolute or universal truth (or at least the impossibility of knowing *that* truth if it does, indeed exist), and the observation that there is no such thing and a common shared human experience. Too many times and for too many people the metanarrative has failed to work, explain, or comfort. On the contrary the stories cultures have used to define themselves have far too often been used to hurt and destroy and to give justification and credence to an agenda of “blood, soil, and racial destiny.” Take for example “the Christian crusades for the possession of medieval Palestine, Islamic Jihad against infidels, Marxist-Leninist aspirations to world domination and the consequences in Latin America of the Monroe Doctrine as part of the U.S. narrative of liberal democracy.”<sup>231</sup>

Without a reliable source or truth one must ask about the reliability of the story that truth claims to tell. An overview of the history of philosophy will quickly show that there have always been challenges to truth. But the challenges preceding and concurrent with Modernity were always matters of rivals or categories of truth and the ways of knowing.<sup>232</sup> The claim is that since truth is based on human experience and the shared story, then truth cannot of itself exist in a universalizing sense. For the postmodern, there are too many human experiences, too many local stories, and too many failures of those stories for any one of them to be accepted as a mirror of the Truth. The emphasis on abandoning both story and narrative is

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<sup>231</sup> Walsh and Middleton, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be*, 72.

<sup>232</sup> R. Albert Mohler, “Truth and Contemporary Culture,” *Whatever Happened to Truth?*, Andreas Köstenberger, general editor, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005) 53-74.



important for the postmodern, since all correspondence theories of truth are either rejected outright or viewed with deep skepticism. The modernist believed that truth could be discovered through the scientific method. The postmodernist, taking on the mantle of humility says that if there is truth, and there probably isn't, then it is beyond his limited abilities to discover.

Because truth in a knowable, universal, and absolute sense does not exist for the postmodernist, and because there is no unifying and defining story that can claim authority, then it follows for the postmodernist that the sacred texts behind the stories also have no authority or power. "Postmodernism has declared it a fallacy to ascribe meaning to any text, or even to the author of the text."<sup>233</sup> In fact, since the deconstructionist movement that is part of postmodernist studies has removed meaning from authorial intent and granted it to the reader, no text can possibly claim universal meaning or authority. If, as the postmodernist claims, metanarratives and local truth stories are meant to justify and undergird power for the oppressor, then the texts have been wrongly amassed as collections of power words for use by the oppressor. "Any text not pleasing to the postmodernist mind is rejected as suppressive, patriarchal, heterosexist, homophobic, 'speciesist,' or similarly deformed by some other political or ideological bias. The authority of the text is denied, and the most fanciful and even ridiculous interpretations are celebrated as affirming and therefore authentic."<sup>234</sup> It takes little imagination to see how quickly the Bible is rejected by the deconstructionist and postmodernist with the Scriptural claim of supernatural authorship, absolute binding authority, unilateral truth

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<sup>233</sup> Mohler, "Truth and Contemporary Culture" 53-74.

<sup>234</sup> Mohler, "Truth and Contemporary Culture," 56.

statements, and universal scope of application. If this were not enough to disqualify the Scripture from the conversation, surely it would be on the view it presents of the “power mongering, exclusivist, demanding and wrathful God.”<sup>235</sup>

The postmodern rejection of the supernatural and the sacred texts does not mean that the spiritual is also rejected in our Age of Mission. On the contrary, as noted above, while institutionalized religion and public displays of personal faith may be ebbing, we find that religiosity and spirituality are coming in on a rising tide. To be sure, the faith and spirituality of our Age of Mission are not the same as the Church encountered during Christendom. For the majority of American and Western European history, there were generally no more than three primary religious options: Protestant, Catholic, and Jew. The Wars of Religion that followed the Reformation and shadowed the transition from the Medieval to the Enlightenment era were conflicts between differing expressions of Christianity (Jews were involved only as onlookers, financiers, scapegoats and victims). This same triad of religious options was the context of the United States through the 1950s.<sup>236</sup>

However, during the past four decades the United States has seen an explosion of new religious options take root in its soil. One need look for no more complex reason for this growth of religions than the changes in U.S. immigration laws in 1965, 1986, and 1995. Historically, until 1924, immigrants to the U.S. came primarily from Europe. After the changes in the laws, immigration was opened to more and more people from the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America. While many of those coming from Latin American are adherents to the Roman Catholic

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<sup>235</sup> Mohler, “Truth and Contemporary Culture,” 56.

<sup>236</sup> Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 3, relates the same societal makeup in Britain prior to World War II.

Church, many of the other new immigrants knew little or nothing of the traditional big three. These newcomers are Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and even Zoroastrians and animists from Africa and the Caribbean.<sup>237</sup>

The new wave of religionists found less opposition in the 1960s and 1970s than they would have had they arrived even half a century earlier. The United States was ripe for religious change and the new options were eagerly welcomed in many quarters. Disappointment with American modernized civil religion, the youth rebellion of the 1960s looked to the newcomers for new spiritual answers. Like everything else that touches America's shores, religion was changed when it was assimilated and given an American accent. Eastern mantras were sung to the melodies of John Lennon and Paul McCartney, Islam wore blackface and lashed out against Jim Crow in Elijah Mohammed's Detroit-based newspapers, Hindu reincarnation was popularized from Shirley McClain's tree limb, Zen Buddhism gained respectability as soccer moms practiced yoga at the neighborhood gym, and a myriad of newly conceived variations on old Gnosticisms and self-help spiritual options became a part of Oprah's religion-of-the-month club. New religions from all over the world are welcomed in North America, "but almost always adapted to serve purposes the indigenous followers do not intend."<sup>238</sup>

There is something new and different about these new religions in the United States. One reason is the anti-institutional bent left over from Modernity. "There is a deep sense of frustration with organized religion today which is merging with a

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<sup>237</sup> Wells, *All Earthly Pow'rs*, 95-105.

<sup>238</sup> Thomas A. Bandy, *Road Runner, The Body in Motion*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 28.

renewed yearning for the sacred.”<sup>239</sup> Concurrent with this yearning is a conviction that the answers will not be found within organized, traditional, and institutionalized religion. It must be found outside in the new and unusual. The new spirituality points to the reality that the “crucial divide in our time is not—as often claimed—between Modernity and Postmodernity, but rather when the church is no longer able to shape the desires and habits of those who claim to be Christian.”<sup>240</sup> Even if the church sought to regain its former voice, the secularized modern would be deaf to it.

Much of the current brand of spirituality is experimental. Because of the freedom from traditional places and values caused by the urbanization, privatization and rapid changes of technology in Modernity/Postmodernity, we see people who’ve accepted a worldview absent of the true God. Without God people “on an unprecedented scale” engage in a mass experimentation of new values and religions. Great numbers of people want to be avant-garde in their morals and religion.<sup>241</sup> More than a mere desire for the avant-garde is a longing for a connection with the real, true, and meaningful that has been lost in Modernity. Experimentation with various religious options does not generally result in conversions to any of the specific experimental religions, but instead the searchers pick and choose accretions of religiosity and spirituality they like and discard what they do not, resulting in a religion that is personal and eclectic. This new personalized religion “may draw from the Bible but it also looks to the Quran, the Bhagavad-Gita, to medieval mystics, and...contemporary writers like M. Scott Peck.”<sup>242</sup> It becomes what David

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<sup>239</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant* 113.

<sup>240</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2d Ed., 1999), 8.

<sup>241</sup> Wells, *Losing our Virtue*, 27.

<sup>242</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 115.

Wells calls designer religion, a personal pastiche spirituality, a “smorgasbord of spirituality,”<sup>243</sup> and an endless variety of personal homemade religions most famously expressed as “Sheilaism” by Robert Bellah.<sup>244</sup>

The new spirituality is more concerned with the experiential than it is with the doctrinal. Again Wells writes “there is a hunger for religious experience but an aversion to theological definition for that experience.”<sup>245</sup> There is not a true understanding of the awesome otherness of God, the seriousness of sin, and the exclusiveness of the remedy of Christ’s work. The new spirituality gives birth to a mass trivialization of God, His holiness, the depth of sin, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Instead the new spirituality focuses on the perception that what I need is help fixing myself.<sup>246</sup> The movement is away from guilt before God to shame of self.<sup>247</sup> People seek and want a god who will heal, relieve, and comfort them of their anxiety, pain, and, disillusionment; order their chaotic world, repair their marriages and their family in its brokenness, and alleviate the brutality and insecurity of the workplace.<sup>248</sup> Therefore, the search for truth to live by is not valued as highly as finding the power to fix me.<sup>249</sup> Contrasted to traditional

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<sup>243</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 99.

<sup>244</sup> Robert N. Bellah, ed., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 221.

<sup>245</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 99. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 2 explains this shift from doctrine to experience is but a natural part of the inherited humanist tradition of the Renaissance which although composed of many elements “can be grouped into two main strands...the rationalist tradition,...which affirms the human reason as the organ through which alone truth may be known; and there is the spiritualist tradition...which affirms the capacity of the human spirit to make direct contact through mystical experience with the ultimate source of being and truth.

<sup>246</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 29.

<sup>247</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland* 3. “The only thing [in the new spirituality] to feel guilty about is feeling guilty.” Peter Kreeft, “Comparing Christianity & The New Paganism,” *National Catholic Register*, (May, 1987), <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/apologetics/ap0010.html>, (accessed August 12, 2008).

<sup>248</sup> Wells, *Losing our Virtue*, 42.

<sup>249</sup> Wells, *Losing our Virtue*, 43.

spirituality and practice, which taught access to God's presence "through believing His Word and trusting in the Christ of the Word... [the presence of God in] Postmodern spirituality...comes more through the emotions and bodily actions. The raising of hands...swaying to the music, the arms outstretched to heaven, the release of inward emotion, this is what opens the door to the divine reality."<sup>250</sup> The postmodern practitioner of the new spirituality is aware of the presence of God as well as the existence of evil, believes in the sacred in nature, believes that everything happens for a good purpose for oneself, and has experienced significant answer to prayer.<sup>251</sup> What the practitioner of the new spirituality does not believe in is the necessity or existence of an authority outside of one's own feelings and intuitions which take the place of an inspired text.<sup>252</sup> Replacing the Word of God with feeling, they also replace the God of the Word with one that is created in their own image. The God "created in the image of self becomes more real as he more nearly comes to resemble the self, to accommodate its needs and desires."<sup>253</sup> The result of the new spirituality and religion of self is a god who is powerless to meet real needs, change persistent problems, and bring true satisfaction.

### **The Age of Mission and Paganism**

The next characteristic of the Age of Mission is that its spirituality is increasingly influenced by and becoming indiscernible from the paganism found throughout the world through all ages. Originally the term "pagan" referred to one who was from outside the city, a rural person or country dweller. In Christian usage

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<sup>250</sup> Wells, *Losing our Virtue*, 43.

<sup>251</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 114.

<sup>252</sup> *Courage to be Protestant*, 116.

<sup>253</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 100.

a pagan is one who is not a Christian. Others would make pagans equal to polytheists and contrast the pagan to the Jew and Muslim as well as the Christian.<sup>254</sup>

David Wells see paganism as a resurgent mindset in the Age of Mission and lists three characteristics of the pagan mind followed by six concomitants or corollaries.

The first characteristic of the Pagan mind is that it fails to make a distinction between the natural and supernatural. For the pagan all of the rhythms of the natural order are connected to an almost endless variety of deities. In ancient paganism, for every normal, everyday, regular, and seasonal occurrence there was a corresponding deity who controlled that event. In addition, every place on earth was a reflection of a heavenly counterpart. These terrestrial shadows (our world of experience and reality) of the celestial were inhabited and “alive with the powers of celestial beings.” There is no divide between the sacred and the secular for the pagan; every act was a participation in the supernatural world of these spirits and deities and therefore, every act was a participation in the sacred. This participation was not a benign matter of merely sharing space with these spirit beings and gods, there was constant danger of offending, dishonoring, alienating, or running afoul of them. An offend deity might easily become a retaliating deity.<sup>255</sup>

Secondly, the pagan mind does not clearly distinguish between subjective and objective reality. This means that there is little or no distinction between perception

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<sup>254</sup> *The American Heritage College Dictionary*. 1997 3d ed., “pagan,” (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1997).

<sup>255</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 77. It is important to remember that “Christianity is a supernatural religion. It is the exact opposite of all paganisms, ancient or (post)modern. It is about the one God who has made himself known, who has provided an objective truth through the inspired biblical writers, and who, in his grace, has provided the subjective conditions within the hearts of sinners whereby that truth can be received, understood, and obeyed.”

and reality. The perception of color, shape, texture, and sound is how the world really is. Intuition, experience, feelings and dreams are as real—or more so—than that which can be proven by the scientific. Because the natural world is permeated by the supernatural, it makes perfect sense that the spirit world would communicate with people. This communication comes through the extra-rational senses. This does not mean that the pagan mind is incapable of logical reasoning. However, it often does not trust the intellect or what was valued as cold, unaided, objective rationality in the Enlightenment. It seems less trustworthy to think through a circumstance or happenstance in order to fathom its meaning when that meaning could be known by communication from the appropriate deity through the intuition or feelings. When intuition fails, the pagan can resort to the magic of the priest or shaman who is able to discern which god is venting his displeasure and why.

The third characteristic follows logically. The interaction between the natural and the supernatural, the perceived and the real opens the door to a universe in which the living and the dead share space equally and communicate with one another regularly. The good news of this inter-spheric communication (cross-cultural communication taken to a new level!) is that the formerly living can act as go-betweens for the presently living and the gods whom they wish to placate, influence, or use for their own ends.

Wells offers six specific outcomes from this general set of characteristics. (1) The deities are known and experienced through nature. Taken to its logical conclusion it becomes the deification of creation—or the goddess, Mother Earth. (2) From this experience, an understanding of the supernatural is developed. “Apart



from nature there was no other revelation, and apart from experience there was no other means of knowing the intent of the gods. The pagan mind did not search for truth so much as it looked for the meaning of experience.”<sup>256</sup>

For the pagan (3) “The supernatural realm was neither stable nor predictable.” The reversals, calamities, and sufferings of the natural realm were all the result of some “dark intent”<sup>257</sup> of the god(s). No human can be as capricious or unpredictable as the gods. However, in the ancient world of paganism and in present animist cultures this caprice is only appeased—somewhat—by succumbing to the spiritual extortion of ritual and the sacrificial system. The great problem with attempts to bribe the gods is that one never knows in advance what will or will not work. “The efficacy of these actions was never guaranteed; only experience and hindsight could tell whether they had had the desired effect.”<sup>258</sup> It seems at this point that the present postmodern replacement of the unalterable laws of nature discovered and developed in the enlightenment with theories of relativity and the chaos theory are more accurate attempts at explaining the phenomenon of the natural order.

The fourth reality that emerges from the pagan mind is that pagan deities are also sexual beings and therefore the worship carries sexual overtones. In the ancient and animist world there was/is “an intense interest in fertility and reproduction (evident in child sacrifice and other rites) were [are] common. Sexual rites were accorded considerable celestial significance and were viewed as a means of

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<sup>256</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 266-267.

<sup>257</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 267.

<sup>258</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 267.

identifying with nature's rhythms and placating the gods when disharmony broke out."<sup>259</sup>

The fifth outcome is unlike revelational monotheism; there are no moral absolutes in paganism. The caprice of the gods and the uncertainty of the worshipper in knowing the intent or mood of the gods made any appeal to moral absolutes moot. Life in paganism is thoroughly pragmatic, experimental, and inconsistent. The goal is to find harmony and balance with observable nature and the unseen supernatural. As it was for the deist, what is is right. "The same sort of thing is true of all pantheistic religions [and paganism is pantheism more than it is mere polytheism]: the supreme norm is always the status quo, whatever that might be and however it might change...Pagan religion [seeks] to bring society into harmony not with moral absolutes but with the rhythms of life."<sup>260</sup>

Lastly (6), history has no value in paganism. Life is lived in the moment for the moment and the lessons of the past have little worth, since each event is a unique expression of the variable caprice of some god or another. There is no known cause and effect for the pagan religionist. There is no reliable indication from the experience(s) of the present for knowing how to live life in the future.

It is easy to make a connection between the paganism of the ancient world and the ways that we observe postmodernist's expression of their spirituality. "Even America, for so long a bastion of a distinct and vigorous form of cultural Christendom, is now experiencing a society that is increasingly moving away from

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<sup>259</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 268.

<sup>260</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 268. Tony Hillerman, author of a number of popular murder mysteries set on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona and featuring Navajo Tribesmen as the crime solvers very clearly lays out the Native American version of the necessity of balance and harmony in one's life with nature in every novel.

the church's sphere of influence and becoming genuinely neopagan."<sup>261</sup> The original connotation of pagan as a "country dweller," or the dictionary's definition as "one who has no religion, or one who is not a Christian, Muslim or Jew,"<sup>262</sup> is not the paganism that is described here. Neither is Thomas Bandy's assertion that "the word *pagan* is simply the way things are."<sup>263</sup> However, Bandy is more on target when he says that the world in which we find ourselves in at the beginning of the twenty-first century is,

akin to the first-century Roman Empire: culturally diverse, technologically innovative, militarily powerful....Twenty-first-century America is not *analogous* to the pagan culture of the first century. It *is* the pagan culture of the first century...The 'pagan' world is not a sociological background for ecclesiastics to condescendingly reflect on culture and religious diversity, but, rather, an existential phenomenon in which real people desperately search for truth and the purpose of living while being pulled in a hundred directions at once.<sup>264</sup>

Bandy and Wells are writing of the same religious shift in our culture. Peter Jones' synthesis of this cultural shift completes the connection between the old and

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<sup>261</sup> Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 51.

<sup>262</sup> "pagan." *The American Heritage College Dictionary*. 3d ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1997).

<sup>263</sup> Bandy, *Road Runner*, 17.

<sup>264</sup> Bandy, *Road Runner*, 17-18. See also Peter Jones, *Capturing the Pagan Mind, Paul's Blue Print for Thinking and Living in the New Global Culture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 3-86. Some of the similarities Jones lists there are the Roman Bread and Circus, feminism, a redefinition of the family, alternate sexuality, drop in the birth rate, peace movements, rise of the goddess, one world government and the merging global village. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, takes a different tack on paganism in the twenty-first-century. He connects the passionate consumerism of modernity as "thoroughly pagan." Hirsch writes, "Speaking to the insecurity of the human situation, it was Jesus who said, 'So do not worry, saying *what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or what shall we wear?* For the pagans run after these things, and your heavenly father knows you need them, But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well.' (Matt 6:31-33) Consumerism is thoroughly pagan. Pagans *run after* these things...Seen in this light...lifestyle [programs] are the most pagan and *paganizing* shows on TV... [They] paganized us, because they focus us on that which so easily enslaves us. In the banality of consumerism reaches a climax as we are sold the lie that the thing that will complete us is a new kitchen or a house renovation... These shows are far more successful promoters of unbelief than even outright intellectual atheism, because they hit us at that place where we must render out trust and loyalty. Most people are profoundly susceptible to the idolatrous allure of money and things. We do well to remember what our Lord said about serving two masters and about *running after* things. (Matt 6:24-33) 110-111.

new paganisms. Jones follows a slightly different tangent, however, and connects the New Age worldview of the twenty-first century American to the monistic religious traditions of the Far East. He simplifies his work by listing “the five points of paganism.”<sup>265</sup>

The first of the five points of paganism is “All is one; one is All.” “It is helpful to think of paganism as a circle and everything is within the circle. All reality is equal, there is no dividing line between creator and creation/creature. This is much the same as Wells’ description of paganism as combining the natural and the supernatural. This is raw pantheism. Again, we do well to remember that from the Biblical teaching there is not only one circle, there are two. There is the circle that is God the creator, the One who is other and there is the circle that is creation. The two are completely different. This is what Wells refers to so clearly and helpfully as the “Outside God.”<sup>266</sup>

Since all reality is one, Jones’ second point that “all humanity is one” follows logically. The drive is to bring balance and harmony to the world by uniting humanity. Unity and globalism are celebrated and pursued. The harmony of the world cannot be realized until each individual who has all of the All is able to share with the All in every one else. More importantly, since each person is a condensation of the All, each person not only has a spark of the divine, but is himself or herself divine.

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<sup>265</sup> What follows is taken from Peter Jones, *Gospel Truth Pagan Lies: Can You Tell the difference?* (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 1999), and the present author’s notes from a 2008 seminar with the same title presented in Coventry, CT April 2008. See also *Spirit Wars, Pagan Revival in Christian America*, (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 1997), and *Capturing the Pagan Mind*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003).

<sup>266</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 124-134.

The third point of Jones' paganism is "all religions are one." This is so pervasive and so universally accepted that few people question its "truth." It is easy to see that if "All is one and one is All" and if the divine is in all, then any one expression of religion is equal to any or every other expression. For many in our day at a popular, everyday level, the issue is not so much that all religions or truth claims are equal and valid and deserve to be considered and tolerated, it is that people demand to invent and determine and choose and concoct and develop their own personal religion, taking from and using any parts or ingredients of the whole range of religious, philosophical, and worldview options. Pluralism claims that there are many valid sources from which to choose, relativism claims that they are all equally valid, materialism says that there is no transcendent, personal, and ultimately authoritative God, and individualism promotes the primacy of the self. It then follows naturally that the individual should have the freedom and right, yea, even the responsibility to determine and choose for himself the religion and worldview that best fits and works.

Jones' fourth point is that the world suffers from one problem: the world is not as it should be. The pagan answer to this problem is not the Christian answer. The Christian answer is that individuals are separated from the creator by rebellion and sin. The pagan answer, on the other hand, is that persons are separated from the One that is the All. Believing the illusion that there are distinctions within reality causes this separation. The problem comes when people accept the illusion as reality. The solution, then, is to eliminate all of the illusions (those things which we see and think are separate, distinct realities). All of these apparent differences are mere points on

the circumference of the circle of oneness, and all share the same essence. Jones lists twenty pairs of these illusory distinctions, for example: creator/creature; God/man; animal/human; life/death; truth/falsehood; the Bible/other scriptures, sacred writings; male/female; and homosexual/heterosexual. "Paganism takes the prerogative of defining reality, what is ultimate, and what is sin."<sup>267</sup> However, because there is no distinction between truth and lie, good and evil, God and Satan, there is no category of sin as the Bible knows it. Sin is, instead, making these distinctions and failing to draw all things together in the one.

The last of Peter Jones' five points of paganism is that there is also One Solution: to bring the world back into oneness and harmony. To do this is to look within the self, to eliminate the perception of distinctions and to become one with the One.<sup>268</sup> This new paganism is built on the shaky ground of the all-sufficiency of the sin-shattered self. When the finite and broken is tested for strength, it is found to be devoid of even "the uncertain, quaking, or fanatical demeanor of ancient pagans."<sup>269</sup>

Jones echoes David Wells' definition of paganism as "the religion that starts with self and reaches up toward God."<sup>270</sup> Because paganism is also pantheistic,

The assumption that we have direct access to the sacred through the self rests on a pagan assumption: that the creator and the creation are related to one another pantheistically. God, it is assumed, is found within the self. He is naturally discovered in the depths of our being. This speaks both to our understanding of sin—that no rupture has taken place—and to our thought about creation, that he who makes and that which is made are the two parts of one reality.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 169.

<sup>268</sup> See Bandy, *Road Runner*, 22-47 for a discussion of the similarities of the old and new paganisms as well as the incursion of a new Gnosticism into the North American religious psyche and practice; also James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 118-170.

<sup>269</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 188.

<sup>270</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 121.

<sup>271</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 169.

This paganism that so confidently reaches up to God is what Peter Kreeft calls “the new paganism.”<sup>272</sup> Kreeft sees something different in this new paganism that was lacking in its older more traditional forms. The problem is not that paganism exists in the world today—for it has always existed as “the natural gravity of the human spirit, the line of least resistance, religion in its fallen state.” The problem is that in the Age of Mission there is a resurgent paganism that is seeking to establish itself as an acceptable option to the weightless veneer of practice and belief that is passed off as Biblical Christianity. Kreeft notes that the new paganism has three significant differences between it and the older traditional paganism: The new paganism (1) lacks a sense of piety (*pietas*); (2) has no base for objective morality; and (3) lacks an awe and respect for the transcendent.

The autonomous, self-deifying individualist of the new paganism has lost or never had a sense of *pietas*, the “natural modesty and respect to something greater than self.” There is no more of the instinctive humility that recognizes one’s subordinate place in the “greater scheme of things.” The new pagan exhibits what Kreeft calls an attitude of arrogance that flows naturally from the idea that man unseparated from creation, is divine. The divinized man/god of the new paganism bows to no one or no-thing, but demands and expects that all nature bows to him as one who has been granted an infinite value as a human person.

The second difference from the traditional paganism that Kreeft finds in the new is a complete lack of objective morality. Not so very long ago C. S. Lewis could argue without fear of contradiction that one of the proofs for the existence of God was that each person and each of the world’s cultures shared a common understand

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<sup>272</sup> Kreeft, “Comparing Christianity & The New Paganism.”

of basic rights and wrongs. There was an agreed upon commonality in human ethical systems. Kreeft says for “the Pre-modern man, pagan as well as Christian, moral rules were absolute: unyielding and unquestionable.”<sup>273</sup> The great fear in traditional paganism was to knowingly or unwittingly transgress one of these ethical universals. This fear does not exist in the new paganism. It cannot, since each (divine) person is the maker of his own personal value/ethics system. The older systems, both pagan and Christian, taught that moral standards are written on the human heart; “the new pagan says that moral codes are written by the human heart.”<sup>274</sup> As a descendant of modernism, the new pagan denies the validity and inviolability of Divine revelation. Each writer of laws is free to live by their own laws, but not to judge the validity of the moral values of another or to impose their value system on any one else. “The new paganism’s favorite scripture is ‘Judge not.’”<sup>275</sup> This is a new twist on the polytheism of paganism. Now the pantheon dwells visibly on earth and Mount Olympus is in every heart. When science removed deity from our realm of experience, the innate worship impulse which is meant to go upward and outward turned more deeply inward than ever before in the old paganism. What wonderful freedom and power has been granted to the gods and goddesses of the new paganism! Unjudged, unbridled law makers, givers of pronouncements, deniers of reality are beholden to no one, believing it is more blessed to give (laws to self) than to receive (from a source external to self).

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<sup>273</sup> Kreeft, “Comparing Christianity & The New Paganism,” Note that at this point Kreeft disagrees with David Wells. See page 87 this paper.

<sup>274</sup> Kreeft, “Comparing Christianity & The New Paganism.”

<sup>275</sup> Kreeft, “Comparing Christianity & The New Paganism.”



The arrogance of the deified law-giver has eroded all sense of awe and respect and worship and reverence for something bigger and beyond self. Where the old paganism knelt before the transcendent, the new paganism stands with knee and back unbowed, head high and fist raised in defiance to any and all who would deny its superiority. The old paganism had an awe and respect for the *something* that was bigger and beyond self. The mystery of the universe, its origins, and life called out for a respectful and humble response. One is reminded of the Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks comedy sketches interviewing the 2,000-year-old man. When the 2,000-year-old man was asked how religion was invented, he answered, “we found out there was somebody bigger than Phil.” He went on to explain that Phil was a big, strong and mean man who would trammel anyone who crossed him. Phil was worshipped, that is appeased out of fear. One day a bolt of lightening struck and killed Phil. “That’s when we realized there’s somebody bigger than Phil.”<sup>276</sup> The modern man of the new paganism has no one bigger than Phil—or bigger than himself. The new paganism retains the “thrill and patina of religion” but “the terror of religion is removed.”<sup>277</sup> The new paganism a triumph of wishful thinking that emphasizes the love of God that casts out all fear. The problem, however, is that when God has become the Pillsbury Doughboy, there is no fear to cast out. And when there is no fear to cast out, perfect love lacks its strong roots. It becomes instead mere compassion—something good but dull, or even weak: precisely the idea people have today of religion. The shock is gone. That the God of the Bible should

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<sup>276</sup> Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner, “The Complete 2000 Year Old Man,” Rhino Records, 1997.

<sup>277</sup> Kreeft, “Comparing Christianity & The New Paganism.”

love us is a thunderbolt: that the God of the new paganism should love us is a self-evident platitude.<sup>278</sup>

The new spirituality wants to be accepted as one among many viable religious options. It may require that its tolerance of other systems be reciprocated by those systems, but the new spirituality, which starts with self does not end with God.

There is a conflict, not a mere antithesis; there is a severe dichotomy, not a mere disagreement; there is out and out conflict, not two sides of the same coin; a yin and a yang seeking to be joined together harmoniously. This conflict is between two distinct and diametrically opposed forms of spirituality, “one inspired by the Spirit of God who gives life, and the other by unholy spirits from the domain of death.”<sup>279</sup>

Summing up all of what he has written of postmodern spirituality and paganism both within and without the church. Wells says,

Biblical spirituality and our contemporary spirituality are not two variations on the same theme. They are stark alternatives to each another. In the one, God reaches down in grace; in the other, the sinner reaches up (or in) in self-sufficiency. These spiritualities belong in different worlds, one moral in its fabric and the other psychological. One thinks in terms of salvation, the other of healing. One results in holiness, the other looks for wholeness. In the one, God’s sovereignty is seen in the establishment of what is spiritual; in the other, a human-seized sovereignty is at work to create its own spirituality. Between these two kinds of spirituality there can be no accord, no peace, no cooperation. The one excludes the other. This is the message we have heard from the apostles. This is the message of that was recovered at the time of the Reformation. And this is the message that should be resounding in the church today.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 169.

<sup>279</sup> Peter Jones, *Pagan Spirituality*, 2006.

<http://www.cwipp.org/articles.asp?section=Peter&id96102&pf=1>, (accessed May 12, 2008).

<sup>280</sup> Wells, *Courage to be Protestant*, 177-178 See all of pages 176-178, 188, 191.

## The Problem for Biblical Preaching in the Age of Mission

What do we say of this Age of Mission? How is the preacher to speak into this culture that wavers between the practical atheism of secularism and a bold neo-paganism?<sup>281</sup> Do we throw up our hands in hopelessness, surrender, or pessimism? Certainly the answer is not to withdraw into enclave, fortress, or any other world-rejecting stance. Still less acceptable is an accommodation to the culture that dilutes the distinctives of the Gospel in an attempt to make it more palatable to the taste and harmonious to the ears of the self-centered, autonomous, rationalist, new-ager, secularist, experientialist, self-helper, and pagan. Lesslie Newbigin may be correct in saying that the paganism in our society “having been born out of the rejection of Christianity, is more resistant to the gospel than the Pre-Christian paganism with which cross-cultural missions have been familiar.”<sup>282</sup> But we cannot do what the church has never done. We cannot run, hide, or give up. The church has its marching orders, and it must, in order to carry out those orders, see the current situation as a time and a place of challenge and excitement; then go back to the Word of God and seek His instructions for not only what to say to the culture, but how to say it as well. These instructions will be considered in the next chapter.

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<sup>281</sup> Robert L. Wilken, “No Other Gods,” *First Things* 37, (November 1993), 13-18; Peter Jones asks similarly, “And what about evangelism in our over-evangelized nation? How can we speak meaningfully of the Gospel to a culture which still claims to be Christian, even ‘born again,’ but is, in practice more and more apostate and pagan?” in “*Pagan Spirituality*.”

<sup>282</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 20.

## CHAPTER TWO: A BIBLICAL MODEL FOR PREACHING

How the preacher is to preach in this Age of Mission? Twentieth-century French philosopher, Simone Weil answered this question when she said, “To be always relevant, you have to say things which are eternal.”<sup>1</sup> Of course it matters what one uses as the definition of those “things that are eternal.” Every Evangelical preacher is going to base that definition on the Word of God. It is God’s Word that is both eternal and everlasting (Isaiah 40:6-8; Matthew 24:35). To speak with relevance, then, is to speak the eternally true Word of God. However, preaching is more than merely speaking as Archibald Alexander taught in his classes at Princeton in the nineteenth century:

Biblical Preaching is the incarnation of the divine Word and Presence in the verbal proclamation of God’s message through the lips of one of his servants to fallen humanity; its human character is suffused and enlivened with that which partakes of the created order but comes from outside the created order. Outward similarities in form and function must never mislead us into overlooking the inward differences between *human speech and Spirit-anointed gospel proclamation*.<sup>2</sup>

It is entirely possible to speak the Word as the Word of God without relevantly, and thus effectively communicating the Word as it is taken across the mission frontier. Biblical Preaching is a declaration of the work(s) of God throughout all time as presented in the Bible. It expounds those works to a contemporary

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<sup>1</sup>David McLellan, *Simone Weil: Utopian Pessimist*, (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 2.

<sup>2</sup>James M. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching, Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 73. This definition from A. Alexander who died in 1851, predates the famous definition of Phillips Brooks, “Preaching is the bringing of truth through personality.” quoted by Kent R. Hughes, “Restoring Biblical Exposition to its Rightful Place,” 83-95, *Reforming Pastoral Ministry*, ed. John H. Armstrong, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 86. “Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men.” “*The Joy of Preaching*,” Phillips Brooks, Introduction by Warren W. Wiersbe, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1989), 25, (*italics in original*). “Let a man be a true preacher, really uttering the truth through his own personality, and it is strange how men will gather to listen to him.” 29.

audience in language and thought forms that are familiar to them. Biblical preaching must have the same purpose as the Bible it expounds. It must point to the ultimate end of bringing glory to the divine author as He brings lost rebels to himself. Biblical preaching is based on a specific text of Scripture and it explains and exposes the meaning of the text in such a way that is consistent with the entirety of the biblical message. Our concern should be that our preaching is consistent with the preaching recorded for us in the Bible. In this paper those examples will be limited to the narrative of New Testament book of Acts.<sup>3</sup>

Our method is to first explore three methods that are often used as answers to the question of how to effectively and faithfully preach the eternal word with relevance. These are an audience driven approach, cultural capitulation, and language acquisition. Then we will present a fourth method that serves as the thesis of this chapter. Biblical-Missional Preaching in this or any other Age of Mission is preaching that is founded on and reflective of both the message and the methodology

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<sup>3</sup> I will use the term "Biblical Preaching" to encompass all that is meant by expository preaching as expressed in these definitions: "To expound Scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and people obey him." John Stott, "A Definition of Biblical Preaching," in Haddon Robinson and Craig B. Larson, eds., *Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 24. "Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers." Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980), 20. "The preacher's task is two-fold: To present the true and exact meaning of the Biblical text...means that the sermon must unfold in the natural flow of thought of the original author in a manner that is relevant to the contemporary listener...God is presenting truth not simply to a previous generation, but to us right now." Donald Sunikjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007), 14, J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 28 "The true idea of preaching is that the preacher should become a mouthpiece for his text, opening it up and applying it as a word from God to his hearers, talking only in order that the text itself may speak and be heard," quoted in Steven Lawson, *Famine in the Land, A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), 18.

of the preaching in the Book of Acts. Before we consider these four methods we will attempt to define missional as it will be used in this paper.

### **Missional Defined**

Much has been written in recent years on the missional nature of the church. For some, the term refers to a certain hipness and cultural with-it-ness in method and style. Used this way it is nothing more than a new way to say contextualized outreach. For others it is a new way to talk about the Great Commission as a foreign mission mandate. In some mainline protestant contexts missional is merely a way to revitalize moribund churches with a new sense of evangelistic priority. It is hard to imagine that there are churches that would not sign up to be known as missional!

Scott Thomas draws these various uses together saying,

Missional is one of the most misunderstood words used in Evangelicalism today. The term is used in a way to mean anything that is evangelistic or contextualized ministries or edgy and sometimes just defined in the "cool" category (we're "missional" because we play indie rock, have a soul patch and worship in a dimly-lit warehouse with candles and artwork).... For those tired of organized religion, it may be a defining word to live like Jesus without aligning with a church that is perceived to be irrelevant.<sup>4</sup>

Missional is a term that arises from the writing of Lesslie Newbigin and the application of his thinking by the study group known as the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) beginning with their publication of *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, in 1996, followed closely by *The Missional Church*, in 1998.<sup>5</sup> The emphasis of the GOCN's work is primarily ecclesiological. It is built on the

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.acts29network.org/acts-29-blog/what-is-missional/#\\_ftnref](http://www.acts29network.org/acts-29-blog/what-is-missional/#_ftnref) (accessed January 11, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Hunsberger, George R. and Craig Van Gelder editors, *The Church Between Gospel and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), ; Darrel L. Guder, editor, *Missional Church, A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

presupposition that God is a missionary God who sent the Son into the world to make a people for Himself (John 20:21). The Son, in turn, continues to send the Church into the world today.<sup>6</sup> The *raison d'être* of the Church Universal and local is to imitate and image the sending God. The Church in every time and place is meant to continue moving into the world as incarnational<sup>7</sup> heralds of the Good News that God has initiated in Christ. This mission (*missio Dei*) is one of reconciliation, restoration, salvation, and healing through the eternal Son, which is now being carried on through the presence, power and activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

The change in focus that the GOCN writers advocated takes *missions* out of the catalogue of the local church's activities and programs and moves *mission* to the heart of the church's identity. Mission is no longer to be thought of as going far away and evangelizing people outside of the pale of Christendom (and taking with it the "benefits" of Western European culture)<sup>8</sup> Mission is the heartbeat of everything the church does on both the local and global stages. Church planter and missiologist Ed Stetzer combines these two arenas into one that he calls "glocal."<sup>9</sup> Reggie

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<sup>6</sup> It must be admitted that the concept of Church as Missionary is neither original nor exclusive with this group of writers. Some thirty years before the inception of the GOCN, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 42, wrote referring to 1 Thess 1:6ff, "Now the Church is a missionary body, and we must recapture this notion that the whole Church is part of this witness to the Gospel and its truth and message."

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1: Incarnational Ministry.

<sup>8</sup> Answering that criticism is Darrell L. Guder, *The Ongoing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). "The fundamental idea of the term 'mission,' based on its Latin root, is 'sending' (*missio*). For Western church of modern Christendom from the seventeenth century on, the thrust of this send its representatives, its Catholic and Protestant missionaries, to the non-Christian world, in order to evangelize non-Christian cultures. Believers went to pagans, the civilized to the barbarians, the sophisticated to the primitive, in order to evangelize them. The unquestioned assumption of the Western Christian was that God intended all people to become Christians and, in the process, become culturally Europeans. Western Christendom saw itself as the normative cultural form of gospel faith, was responsible for it, and now had the opportunity and obligation to spread its benefits abroad. 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> Ed Stetzer and David Putnam, *Breaking the Missional Code, Your Church can be a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 5. "One of the biggest cultural barriers we face is the emerging 'glocal' context. We use the term to refer to the convergence

McNeal defines missional as a response to God's invitation to "to join him in his redemptive mission in the world:"<sup>10</sup>

That's the church's mission: to join God in his redemptive efforts to save the world. People all around us are in darkness. They are going to die unless someone finds a way to save them. Trouble is the church is sleeping on the job. Too many of us have forgotten why we showed up for work. Even worse, many of us have never known.<sup>11</sup>

One of the problems that McNeal sees is that the church has for too long been concerned with institutional growth and not with Kingdom [of God] growth.<sup>12</sup> True mission is diluted when a local church or a denomination seeks to build their own particular religious franchise instead of growing the realm of King Jesus. Instead of embracing a glocal kingdom oriented mission the church has instead fragmented into a plethora of competing, self-absorbed and often redundant service outlets.

Writing seven years later, McNeal is much more optimistic and confident that the church is getting its priorities straight. He calls the shift from doing church as we always done it to joining the mission of God the "single biggest development in Christianity since the Reformation."<sup>13</sup> This remains to be seen of course. It does not seem either entirely accurate or entirely fair to categorize all of the missionary and evangelistic activity of the previous nineteen centuries as missing God's call to join Him in his redemptive purposes, as self-absorbed institution building, or as mere civilization and culture expansion. Can we really say that the history of missions is a story of wrong-headedness? Can we really say that Patrick, Columba, Boniface,

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of the **global** reality with our **local** reality. North American has become a "**glocal** community" requiring new strategies for effective ministry." (Emphasis in original).

<sup>10</sup> Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future, Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 15.

<sup>11</sup> McNeal, *The Present Future*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 2 Kingdom of God.

<sup>13</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance, Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), xiii.



Francis of Assisi, Benedict, Francis Xavier, and Raymond Lull more interested in expanding the institution than they were preaching the gospel? Do we need to say that the Reformers were consumed with building their kingdoms and not Christ's? Did the hundreds of French pastors sent from Geneva to die as martyrs in France go to expand Calvin's Geneva or to spread the pure gospel?<sup>14</sup> What institution was benefitted by the labors of John Wesley, George Whitefield, David Brainerd, John J. Girardeau<sup>15</sup> and Charles Colcock Jones<sup>16</sup>

The story of missionary activity may be besmirched by improper motives, tainted with imperialism and hampered by shortsighted goals, but it seems both myopic and self-serving to our own generational understandings to say that we have just now rediscovered this great epoch-making renaissance of the *missio Dei*.

In fairness to those who are writing and speaking about the missional nature of the church, we realize that the conversation is not merely concerned with whether the church evangelizes on either a local or foreign field. The concept is that the very nature of the church is missional and everything it does is to be concerned with functioning according to its nature. We can no longer think of missions as "something churches support and that takes place somewhere else in the world through specially trained individuals known as missionaries." Nor can we be content to think of evangelism "as something a few persons do in a local congregation

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<sup>14</sup> W. J. Grier, "The Remarkable Growth of Protestantism in France," *Banner of Truth*, 1-7, Issue 566, November, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Kelly, "John J. Girardeau: Unction at Work", *Preachers With Power, Four Stalwarts of the South* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 119-170. Girardeau preached to a primarily African slave congregation in Charleston, South Carolina in the Antebellum South.

<sup>16</sup> Iain Murray, "Charles and Mary Colcock Jones" in *Heroes*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 173-258. Charles and Mary Colcock Jones were itinerant evangelists from the Southern aristocracy who preached to slaves on a number of plantations in the Old South and planted churches on many of them as well.

through a committee, or as one of the programs of the church.”<sup>17</sup> At the same time we need to see that there is a significant difference created by the little *s* that separates mission from missions. Missions are a function of the church often supported by complex and sophisticated churchly bureaucracies. Adding to the confusion is the fact the *mission* is also used in a functional or teleological sense often as a synonym for vision, purpose, or goal. Because God is a missionary God and a missionary-sending God, and because the church is sent as a missionary body into the world, mission is inherent to the church and ought to be reflected in all of the church’s functions and realized as its purpose for being. When we say that the church’s nature is inherently mission we disallow any conversation or understanding that makes it a “sub-topic of the church.”<sup>18</sup> Lois Barrett uses the word *character* in place of *nature* and writes,

To be missional is a matter of the *character* of the church, what it is, whose the church is. Mission is not just one of the many activities of the church alongside of Christian education, worship, and so on. Mission describes the nature of the church. Its education will be oriented toward proclaiming and being a sign of the reign of God. Its worship will be oriented toward proclaiming and being a sign of the reign of God. Participation in God’s mission to the world will permeate the whole life of the congregation.<sup>19</sup>

In this view, church and mission are not two distinct entities. They speak about the same reality. The danger of separating church and mission into distinct entities is that “we tend to end up with dichotomies between ministry functions and competition among organizational structure.”<sup>20</sup> Understanding the missional nature

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<sup>17</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church, A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Guder, *The Ongoing Conversion of the Church*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Lois Y. Barrett, “Embodying and Proclaiming the Gospel,” in Lois Y. Barrett et al. *Treasure in Clay Jars, Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 151.

<sup>20</sup> Barrett, “Embodying and Proclaiming the Gospel,” 30-31. In 2007 Van Gelder wrote *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), as a follow-up to *The*

of the Church brings us to ask, how can we join God in his mission? A part of joining that mission means taking a look at the nature of our preaching. Does the preaching of the church best join God in his mission by 1) making the audience supreme, 2) being assimilated by the culture, or 3) merely learning the language and mores of the audience's culture? Is the answer in a combination of these approaches, or does the New Testament give us clear direction?

### **Preaching when Audience is King**

For much of the latter half of the twentieth century many Protestant Evangelicals were caught up in the theories, claims, and promises of the Church Growth Movement.<sup>21</sup> This was especially true after the highly publicized successes of Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Church in the 1980s. Willow Creek cast a long shadow across American evangelicalism. Soon churches and pastors and leaders of every denominational stripe were queuing up for the latest how-to's and sure-fire steps to ministry success from church growth gurus. Hybels stressed a seeker-driven model of ministry. In this model based on marketing theory, Bill Hybels and his West Coast doppelganger Rick Warren of Saddleback Church went to the

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*Essence of the Church* (2000). This conception of the church as purely *missional* is now catching hold among church leaders and congregations across a wide range of denominations. The *missional church* discussion is capturing a basic impulse within many church in the United States that there is something about the church that makes it inherently missionary. But is clear that confusion still even exists over what the term *missional* really means. Some appear to want to see it to reclaim, yet one more time, the priority of missions in regard to the church's *various activities*. (emphasis mine) Unfortunately, this misunderstanding continues the effort to define a congregation primarily around what it *does*. The concept of a church being *missional* moves in a fundamentally different direction. It seeks to focus on what the church *is*—that it is a community created by the Spirit and that it has a unique nature, or essence, which gives it a unique identity. In light of the church's nature, the missional conversation then explores what the church *does*. Purpose and strategy are not unimportant in the missional conversation, but they are understood to be derivative dimensions of understanding the nature, or essence of the church. Likewise changing cultural contexts are not unimportant, but they are to be understood to be conditions that the church interacts with in light of its nature or essence. 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> Bill Hull, "Is the Church Growth Movement Really Working?," *Power Religion*, (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 140-159.

unchurched and asked them what they didn't like in the church. The unchurched were polled to discover what they wanted to see in the church that would draw them in. The unchurched, no longer called unbelievers, were now known as seekers, and the Hybels/Warren model came to be known as the Seeker-Driven church.

Hybels taught that "unchurched people are the ultimate consumers" and that sermons need to be addressed to the consumers' sense of need and interest.<sup>22</sup> In this model the seeker as customer was king. Facilities, programs, language, and sermons were all designed to reach seekers by appealing and catering to their desires. Preaching was pointed at meeting felt needs, answering practical questions, and providing templates for successful living. Hybels even claimed that properly titling sermons would bring people to church. He said the content of a sermon may be doctrinally pure and relate well to the secularized person, but if it is not marketed properly the unchurched will never come to hear it.<sup>23</sup> In this highly pragmatic approach the preacher risks losing confidence in the sufficiency of the Scripture. Instead of making the Scriptural message central and calling people to conform to the text, the text is exploited to conform to the wants of the consumer-listener. The church growth practitioner would claim incarnational sensitivity and cultural relevance driven, by a desire to be effective in communication.

However, David Wells cautions us here regarding the culture of our listeners. The culture of the West is "principally one of commerce and consumption. To speak in the language of consumption [audience and/or consumer driven], to use its speech and ways, is to speak contextually.... It is to enter the culture and mind-set of" our

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<sup>22</sup> Bill Hybels, "Speaking to the Secularized Mind," 31, Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe and Haddon Robinson. *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989), 27-41.

<sup>23</sup> Hybels, "Speaking to the Secularized Mind," 31.

listeners and “its logic.”<sup>24</sup> The danger is great. God, his character, his demands, and the ultimacy of his solution to our real situation and problem is diluted. God becomes little more than a fix-it to bad habits, unhappy marriages, unfulfilling careers, and the trials of uncooperative children.

Because this approach tends toward topical preaching, the preacher hopscoches through Biblical material without ever giving listeners a systematic diet of its message. In the attempt to be audience-driven and culturally contextual, the preacher robs the listener of a message that is driven by the Divine Author’s intent and which is rooted in the wider context of redemptive history. The result is what Albert Mohler calls a “crisis in preaching.” He says that it “would be an exercise in self-delusion if we tried to pretend that there is nothing wrong with the preaching that happens in most evangelical churches.”<sup>25</sup> This crisis is upon us because Evangelicals

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<sup>24</sup> Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*, 50. Wells lists four mistakes the audience driven model (or marketers as he has dubbed them) have made in their approach. 1) They have misread the results of the methodology. Mere numbers and popularity do not equal true and successful discipleship, 2) they have wrongly feared the bogeyman of encroaching postmodernity. Rather than fight with bold assertions and applications of truth the marketers have invented strategies for accommodating this new cultural milieu. Wells wonders why accommodationists can’t see their failure as the center of Christianity moves from the Northern European/North American axis to the southern hemisphere. He says that the Western church has merely changed dance partners—from the Enlightenment to Postmodernism. 3) The marketing strategists in the church have chosen the wrong analogy of business for its model. Business promises the consumer satisfaction. Christianity calls for sacrifice. 4) They have targeted the wrong customer! Instead of looking at the presently unchurched to see what they want, Wells follows Thom Rainer’s suggestion in Thom Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), that marketer poll the *recently and formerly* unchurched to see what “worked” to bring them in. 44-57. John MacArthur, *The Truth War*, (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2007), writes of what he calls Evangelicals’ “pathological devotion to superficiality” for “*Runaway pragmatism and trivial pursuit*.” “The most compelling question in the mind and on the lips of many pastors today is not ‘What’s true?’ but rather ‘What works?’ Evangelicals care less about *theology* than they do *methodology*. Truth has taken a back seat to more pragmatic concerns. When a person is trying hard to customize one’s message to ‘felt needs’ of one’s audience, earnestly contending for the faith is out of the question. That is precisely why for many years now, evangelical leaders have systematically embraced and fostered almost every worldly, shallow, and frivolous idea that comes into the church. A pathological devotion to superficiality has practically become the chief hallmark of the movement. Evangelicals are obsessed with pop culture, and ape it fanatically. Contemporary church leaders are so busy trying to stay current with the latest fads that they rarely give sober thought to weightier scriptural matters.” 147-148.

<sup>25</sup> Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 50.

are seduced by a philosophy of preaching<sup>26</sup> that allows the “therapeutic concerns of culture to set the agenda for preaching.”<sup>27</sup>

Audience-driven preaching will ultimately fail because it does not share or reflect the Bible’s concern is to show the wonder, majesty and glory of God through his great works, and principally his great work of redemption through Christ. As God told Moses at the edge of the Red Sea, “I will get the glory (Exodus 14:4, 17), and to the people of Israel through the prophet Isaiah, My glory I give to no man” (Isa. 42:7). This self-glorifying God is the subject of the Scripture from which we preach and must also be the subject every sermon that we preach. Audience-driven sermons along with attempts to make the setting of Sunday morning more user-friendly to the unchurched put people at the center, not God. It is man who is glorified when man is made the focus of preaching. Church may be seen as more fun and more entertaining and even more relevant but this often comes at the expense of awe and wonder at the transcendence of God, who is not only the subject but the object of our worship.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, critiques topical and narrative preaching in this section as a contrast to expository preaching. While both of these forms can be subsumed under expository preaching as ways to expose the meaning of the text (both C. H. Spurgeon and M. Lloyd-Jones can be cited as examples of this kind of topical preaching), Mohler’s concern is that narrative as story-telling to make a biblical point and topical need based preaching often ignore the text in favor of the message.

<sup>27</sup> Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, has little favorable to say about current trends toward topical and narrative styles of preaching. Steven J. Lawson laments the fruit of this kind of preaching as a “famine in the land.” Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land, A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching*, Foreword by John MacArthur, Jr. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003) “Tragically, most of what passes for biblical preaching today falls woefully short of apostolic standards. Many pastors seem content to dole out pabulum to spiritual babies instead of teaching the full counsel of God. Many evangelical ministers have succumbed to delivering secular-sounding messages aimed at soothing the felt needs of restless church-shoppers or, worse salving the consciences of unregenerate church members. Rather than expounding the depths of God’s Word, many Bible-believing ministers have chosen the path of least resistance, content to scratch the surface of shallow souls and tickle the ears of languid listeners. The result is congregations are starving—even though many of the famished may not be aware of it—settling for sickly sweet, yet totally inadequate, spiritual pabulum.” 38.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant: Leaving a Legacy of Faith for the Next Generation*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 47 writes regarding the Church’s overall ministry and focus:

Audience-driven preaching bows to the self-centeredness of mankind in general and our consumerist North American culture in particular. It is also an obeisance to the oft-repeated warnings that attentions spans are shorter, images are replacing words, and entertaining technology is replacing interpersonal and sustained discourse.<sup>29</sup> So dramatic changes have been made for the Sunday morning gathering. “Admittedly, the initial reaction of many has been favorable. Church is more fun. The music is better. Skits break up the monotony. The multimedia looks really cool, best of all, the sermons are definitely more tolerable. Church has changed, but has it changed churchgoers?”<sup>30</sup> J. I. Packer sees our culture’s current fascination with and demand for relevance not as approbation on bad preaching but as “God’s judgment on...generations of bad preaching by bad preachers.”<sup>31</sup> Preaching has suffered at the hands of man-centeredness and men and women have suffered as well. The listener in the pew (or theater stadium seat as the case may be) suffers as the strong doctrines that sustain us in the trenches of the cosmic warfare we face are exchanged for quick-fix, feel-good-t-shirt-slogan sermons. The diluted theology presents a therapeutic

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“Be assured that this is not a relational model built on sentimentalism and felt-needs theology. It is a relational model built on the covenant of grace. There is a huge difference. The reference point for a needs-based model is experience and feelings. The reference point for a covenant model is God and His Word. *The first exalts self. The second exalts God.*” (emphasis mine).

<sup>29</sup> One reads with surprise, pleasure, and irony the criticisms made of preaching in Victorian England during Charles Spurgeon’s heyday in Zack Eswine, *Kindled Fire, How the Methods of C.H. Spurgeon Can Help Your Preaching*. (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, The Mentor Imprint, 2006), 10-13. Eswine lists hindrances to preaching in that modern age as 1) “the expansion of the penny press, 2) skepticism, suspicion and doubt raised by Darwin and the Higher Criticism, 3) shorter attention span due to the frenetic pace of the culture, material gain, illiteracy, and the perceived dullness of logic, 4) An increased preference for art, architecture and music over the spoken word—and as means of attracting audiences, 5) seminaries seemingly unable to train pastors for the realities of ministry, 6) time demands that kept pastors from proper attention to study and prayer, and 7) the plagiarizing of sermons arising as needed from the demanding pace of ministry.” This sounds as though it were written today and not over 100 years ago (replace penny press with internet). Thom Rainer gives a similar list of pastors’ challenges in today’s world in *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, 54-55.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 4.

<sup>31</sup> J. I. Packer, “Introduction: Why Preach?,” *The Preacher and Preaching*, Samuel T. Logan, ed., (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1986), 17.

Christianity designed to help “me raise my kids, renew my sex life, and help me become all I can be instead of one that teaches the reality “of God, sin, salvation and the cross” which will sustain me in this life and sustain me for next.”<sup>32</sup>

What the audience-driven, seeker-sensitive, felt-needs preachers have failed to realize is the methodology changes the message. One of the mantras of late twentieth-century evangelicals has been “Methods may change as long as the message doesn’t.” This sounds good. It means to make the message primary. But what it doesn’t take seriously is the extent to which the methodology affects, changes, or even contradicts and denies the message. Marshall McLuhan’s dogma that the medium is the message is strangely ignored by relevancy-seeking preachers, whether they be of the modernist or postmodernist stripe. When the audience is the consumer and the demander of newer and more exciting gospel goods, the message cannot but be changed in the process of meeting those demands. The prophetic becomes the palatable, the narrow gate becomes the broad road, exclusivity gives way to pluralistic tolerance, and certitude welcomes doubt. Proclamation is replaced by dialogue and “thus saith the Lord” is substituted with “what do you think this means?” The self-centered audience demands that their ears be tickled and becomes the frog boiled slowly to death in the pot of their own making.

When listeners become consumers and preachers become salesmen and marketers, the gospel is packaged for sale and the buyers then become the owners:

...but in the Church this cannot happen. It is we who are owned in Christ. Christianity is not up for sale. Its price has already been fixed and that price is the complete and ongoing surrender to Christ of those who embrace him by faith. It can only be had on his own terms. It can only be had as a whole. It

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Shaw, *10 Great Ideas from Church History, A Decision –Maker’s Guide to Shaping your Church*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 17-18.



refuses to offer only selections of its teachings. Furthermore, the Church is not its retailing outlet. Its preachers are not its peddlers and those who are Christian are not its consumers. It cannot legitimately be had as a bargain though the marketplace is full of bargain-hunters. For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's Word (II Co 2:17).<sup>33</sup>

When audience-driven, felt-need, topical preaching replaced text-driven expository preaching and what is meant to be the life-giving message of the gospel it became the "death announcement for the church."<sup>34</sup> David Wells writes that churches that "preserve their cognitive identity and distinction from the world will flourish: those who lose them in the interest of seeking success will disappear."<sup>35</sup> This has been proven by the mainline churches that embraced Protestant liberalism in the early twentieth century and it will be the sad epitaph of every other movement that trades the supremacy of the text for the applause of the audience.<sup>36</sup>

### **Cultural Assimilation and Capitulation**

Closely related to the audience-driven model of preaching is a homiletic theory that seeks to communicate with its culture by becoming like the culture. This is not a new temptation for the church. The Church both as an institution and as the people who make it up have always been susceptible to the lure of cultural acceptability and worldly approval.<sup>37</sup> Even those movements within the history of the Church that have begun as other-worldly and "over against culture" (to use Richard Niebuhr's term) soon find themselves succumbing to the pressures of

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<sup>33</sup> Wells, *Above all Earthly Powers*, 308-309.

<sup>34</sup> D.A. Carson quoted in Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Wells, *Above all Earthly Powers*, 308.

<sup>36</sup> David Calhoun *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Tradition 1869-1929*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 273-397.

<sup>37</sup> For changes in the early church following the Edict of Milan, see chapter one of this paper. A compelling contrary opinion is given in Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine, The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2010).

assimilation by the culture in one way or another. On the one hand, standing against culture is wearying and lonely, on the other hand it is easy to feel that retaining anti-cultural barriers work against the success of presenting the Gospel.

Throughout its lifetime the church has often been drawn away from the freedom of Christ-like humility to the slavish prestige of being “in with the in-crowd.”<sup>38</sup> In the New Testament we see this in the controversy between Peter and the Circumcision Party in Acts 11:1-3; Paul and Barnabas and the Judaizers in Acts 15, and again between Paul on one side, and Peter and Barnabas on the other who were “fearing the circumcision party...and [were] led astray by their hypocrisy” (Galatians 2:12,13). After the Edict of Milan (AD 313) gave legal status to Christianity many new adherents were drawn to the church by the seduction of the pomp and riches offered by the glory of Rome. This influx into the church was so strong that hundreds of Christians fled to the desert as monastics rather than be compromised by the prevailing culture. Monasticism flourished and reinvented itself throughout the Middle Ages as each reform movement followed its predecessors into the arms of the gilded siren of worldly approval and power. In our day the siren’s song may not be as much power or approval of the culture as it is a desire to be heard well and clearly by a culture that has relegated all religious talk to the private compartments of individual conscience far away from the public square.

How is the church to respond to culture? D. A. Carson approaches the answer to the question with this overview,

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<sup>38</sup> See for a contemporary perspective on this seduction and the desire of Christians to fit into culture and to be regarded as *cool*, Brett McCracken, *Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010).

Inevitably, Christians respond in various ways. Some advocate one form or another of withdrawal. Others want to gain more access to the media. Still others put forth valiant efforts to influence government and pass appropriate legislation. Some, whether consciously or unconsciously, develop a two-tier mentality, one for Christians and church functions, and the other for the broader cultural encounters that take up most of the rest of the week. Still others think little about these matters but simply want to get on with evangelism and church planting.<sup>39</sup>

In 1951, H. Richard Niebuhr presented his perspective for understanding the relationship between the church and its surrounding culture in his publication of *Christ and Culture*.<sup>40</sup> For over fifty years scholars have been interacting with this well-known and often cited work. In the book Niebuhr lists five ways that the church has met this challenge:<sup>41</sup>

1. Christ against Culture, which is (an often radical) disengagement from the world and an attempt to guard oneself from every act that would suggest loyalty to the world's system. Instead it uncompromisingly affirms the sole authority of Christ over the Christian and resolutely rejects the culture's claims to loyalty.<sup>42</sup>
2. The Christ of Culture, which seeks to recognize Jesus as the one who fulfills the best hopes and dreams of society. In this stance Christians are at home in both the church-culture and the culture of the world. They have baptized the

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<sup>39</sup> D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951). Comments concerning Niebuhr's work are from Carson. For a more popularized version and contemporary application of *Christ and Culture* see Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997). Often overlooked is J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture" published in the *Princeton Theological Review*, Vol. 11, 1913. Machen offers three responses to what he wrote was "One of the greatest of the problems that have agitated the Church is the problem of the relation between knowledge and piety, between culture and Christianity." (<http://www.cambridgestudycenter.com/artilces/Machen2.htm> accessed January 1, 2012). This article deserves to be part of today's conversation since Machen, unlike Niebuhr, wrote a full forty years before the fall of Liberalism and the rise of Niebuhr's Neo-Orthodox position.

<sup>41</sup> This summary from Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 13-30.

<sup>42</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, quoted in Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 13.

good of culture as a reflection or outgrowth of Christ's work and influence in the world. Gnosticism as an amalgam of Christian soteriology and the dualism of pagan mystery religions is one example of this baptism.<sup>43</sup> Another example given in the previous chapter of this paper "was further developed after the Constantinian settlement and the rise of Western Christian Civilization."<sup>44</sup> The Christ of Culture is not the unique God-Man who has come to seek and to save the lost, he is merely a figure in history (sometimes a mythical and unhistorical figure) who stands for the highest and best in spiritual, logical, and moral knowledge. One negative aspect of this position which has been seen in nineteenth and twentieth century Liberalism, is its inability to speak clearly, distinctly, and confidently about the imperative categories of sin, of grace and law and of the members of the trinity—specifically Jesus Christ as God Incarnate.<sup>45</sup>

3. Christ above Culture seeks to synthesize and hold in tension that which is "good" in the culture and that which is demanded in the Bible. Although Niebuhr does not use a category of common grace *ala* Abraham Kuyper<sup>46</sup>, it seems that there is a similarity between Kuyper's position of appreciating the goodness of God's Grace as it is shown in cultural expressions. At the same time the church seeks to obey God by influencing the culture while judging the culture by the canons of God's Word. Carson points out that Niebuhr saw

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Horton, *In the Face of God, The Dangers & Delights of Spiritual Intimacy*, (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1996), and D. G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism*, (New York: Bowman & Littlefield, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 19. We shall also see this in lesser degree when we use it to critique the Emergent Church movement of our own day.

<sup>46</sup> James Edward McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man: Abraham Kuyper*, (Evangelical Press, 2000), For a good introduction to Kuyper's life and thought.

dangers in this approach including: the reduction of the infinite into a humanly manageable system, failure to see how one's cultural conditioning and viewpoint skews judgment, and institutionalizing of the church into culturally acceptable forms.<sup>47</sup>

4. Christ and Culture in Paradox is an extreme dualism that draws a line not between Church and Culture, or Christian and world, but between God and all humankind. The moral corruption of humanity is not solely found in the unregenerate culture but it extends to every human and every work of humans whether outside the ranks of the redeemed or within. Niebuhr's own admission, according to Carson, is that there are very few true dualists.<sup>48</sup>
5. Christ the Transformer of Culture shows a more positive view of culture not as inherently good, but as redeemable. This final category seems to be Niebuhr's preferred position.<sup>49</sup> It is at the same time the position that seems to have been adopted wittingly or unwittingly by contemporary Evangelicals through media, education, and political activism. Niebuhr would put both John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper into this last category.<sup>50</sup>

Of the five categories that Niebuhr presents in his study the most important for the purposes of understanding how one can preach biblically in an Age of Mission

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<sup>47</sup> Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Carson writes, "Although Niebuhr never explicitly aligns himself with any of the five patterns he treats in his volume, what is striking about this fifth paradigm is that he offers no negative criticism whatsoever. Most scholars understand Niebuhr to be bestowing his approval on this approach.

<sup>50</sup> See James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), for contrasting views to the Church's ability to influence and change culture. A further critique of both the Church's ability and responsibility to redeem or transform culture is found in David Van Druenen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010).

are *Christ Above Culture* and *Christ of Culture*. It is these two categories that are most easily adopted by the preacher who wishes to show relevance to the culture he wishes to impact with the Good News. One honestly wonders “How can I impact the cultures birthed by the modernity of the recent past and the postmodernity of the present with a message that sounds hopelessly tied to systems and thought processes far outside of the now?”

The Emergent Church Movement (ECM)<sup>51</sup> answers this question differently than the audience driven church. In the latter the emphasis is on the individual listeners and their felt needs. In the Emergent Church Movement (ECM) the emphasis is placed upon creating an ethos or atmosphere that is very near the cultural ethos of the target audience. At this point it is important to offer a definition of the Emergent Church. The problem with this is that it is as difficult to define as postmodernity. Seeking to define the Emergent church is difficult. Kevin DeYoung calls the attempt “Jell-O Nailing”<sup>52</sup> and says that most of the definitions offered are

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<sup>51</sup> Emergent and Emerging have been used interchangeably over the last decade. For the purposes of this paper Emerging will be used to describe the more theologically orthodox wing of a movement that seeks to be fully relevant to the growing postmodern context while Emergent refers to the segment that is less securely tied to traditional doctrinal orthodoxy represented by twentieth century evangelicalism. To be fair, the emphasis of the Emergents is often heavily on *orthopraxy* and an attempt to properly and consistently live the kingdom life and to redeem culture. However, as we shall see this is often at the expense or minimizing of *orthodoxy*. For an insider’s explanation of the Emergent see Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church, Vintage Christianity for new Generations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches, Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 2005), and Brian McLaren, *Secret Message of Jesus*, cited footnote 11. For more critical responses to the Emergent movement see D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church, Understanding a Movement and its Implications*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason eds., *Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We are Not Emergent by Two Guys Who Should Be*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), and for both sides Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith, Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), also Brett McCracken, fn 38.

<sup>52</sup> DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We are Not Emergent*, 17.

so broad as to be of little help.<sup>53</sup> “[E]mergent means a hundred different things to a hundred different people.”<sup>54</sup> It can, however, be defined by what its protagonists write and say even though those who are generally recognized as the movement’s spokespersons refuse to be labeled as such and even deny that they speak for the whole movement.<sup>55</sup> Dan Kimball wrote in 2003, “the emerging church is more of a mindset than a model. This mindset is a realization that something needs to change in our evangelical churches if we are to reach and engage the emerging culture.... We must look at the inner core with a new mindset.”<sup>56</sup>

In the beginning this “inner core” was limited to ways of doing ministry and emphases in ministry that rebelled against the modernist captivity of the church by its most recent version, the seeker sensitive church. Marketing was replaced by mission, new and trendy was replaced by ancient and vintage, techno-plasticity was replaced by authenticity, and words were increasingly replaced by symbols and images.

Eventually, however, this methodological replacement in the inner core has been joined by a theological exchange. In the name of cultural relevance and audience acceptability, the once sacrosanct dictum “the methods can change as long as the message remains the same” gives way to slippage in the message because it is

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<sup>53</sup> DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We are Not Emergent*, What Christian does not want to ‘(1) identify with the life of Jesus,(2) transform the secular realm,(3 to live highly communal lives’ and as a result ‘(4) welcome strangers, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as pro-ducers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, (9) take part in spiritual activities?’” 18.

<sup>54</sup> DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We are Not Emergent*, 19.

<sup>55</sup> DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We are Not Emergent*. “In an article from theooze.com on June 2, 2005, entitled ‘Response to Recent Criticisms,’ Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Spence Burke, Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball, Andrew Jones, and Chris Seay argue, ‘Contrary to what some have said there is no single theologian or spokesperson for the emergent conversation. We each speak for ourselves and are not official representatives of anyone else, nor do we necessarily endorse everything written or said by one another.’

<sup>56</sup> Dan Kimball *The Emerging Church, Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 14. This mindset seems to have changed in the years since Kimball wrote this.

too easy to ignore or forget that the “medium is the message.” Throughout its history the Church has often allowed the hard edges of the Biblical message to be softened for a wider acceptability. For example, for far too long otherwise theologically orthodox preachers ignored racism in the United States by choosing not to preach about the God-created dignity of all human beings while economies and church budgets were being driven by systemic racial injustice.<sup>57</sup> This was not only true in the Antebellum South; it has remained an issue throughout the history of the United States mitigated only slightly by the successes of the Civil Rights Movement. This is only one example but every era of the Church has softened its message in order to continue to hold place in the culture.<sup>58</sup> This capitulation to the culture and its demands has always proven to be a dead end street for the preaching of the Good News. When Protestant Liberalism [Christ of Culture] was in its ascendancy H. Richard Niebuhr famously critiqued the vacuity of its culturally acceptable message

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<sup>57</sup> For example see Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 5. “...after 1702, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts carried forward the early Protestant effort to convert the slaves within the middle and southern colonies. This Anglican Church organization did not oppose slavery, and in fact several of its ministers were slaveholders. Although its leaders were quite clear in expressing the beneficial relationship between Christianizing Africans and the economics of slaveholding, the approach taken by the society met with some opposition because it entailed teaching slaves to read and write. It was believed that slaves who could read would also think and would develop a strong hatred for the system of slavery and thus threaten its sustainability. Chaos would follow.” “...missionaries made an effort to allay such worries by avowing a gospel that touched the soul and left social and economic arrangements intact.” 7. “Perceived as threatening to the economic welfare of the planters...efforts by Methodist ministers were met with wide resistance. Assumed connections between Methodist teachings and slave revolts fueled this resistance. In order to maintain access to the mission field, many within the Methodist Episcopal Church made peace with the slave system because, in the long run, ‘the mission of the church was to *preach the gospel to every creature* ‘Negroes as well as white. If indignant master kept them from the slaves...the negroes would never know of God’s love for them.” 29. Thomas J. Nettles, *James Petigru Boyce, A Southern Baptist Statesman*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009), 17 writes of the “complicity of Christian ministers” in the process of keeping Christianity from African slaves in the Colonies.

<sup>58</sup> Admittedly, care must be given here and in all places to judge the past in terms of the past, rather than exclusively apply the present to judge the past. However, at the same time we need to be ruthless in judging the present according to our present knowledge and understanding of Scripture.



by saying, "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."<sup>59</sup>

It is the Emergent wing of the church in the present day most susceptible to the landslip of cultural capitulation. From the standpoint of Biblical preaching several themes recur in the ECM that seem to present a muffled, rather than distinct, trumpet call (I Corinthians 14:8). This trumpet call is played as variations on themes presented by the culture not as true echoes of the song of God's plan and purpose for humanity.<sup>60</sup> One of the constant themes heard in the ECM is that the Church has become captive to the tenets of the Enlightenment and ensuing modernity. In this critique Christianity has become subservient to the philosophical constructs of rationalism and foundationalism. There is an irony in this critique of cultural captivity since careful observers see the same trend in the cultural capitulation (and captivity) of ECM to postmodernity. These observers note that aspects of the ECM reflect a similarity with nineteenth century liberalism. One suspects that postmodernity is the presenting issue but not the core issue of the Emergent captivity.<sup>61</sup> The proponents of the ECM question truth and its knowability, eschew confidence and certainty in proclamation, redefine the atonement, reduce the kingdom of God to a mission of cultural transformation through social justice and

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<sup>59</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 193, <http://www.centropian.com/religion/academic/theologians/HRNkit/HNRlinks.html> (accessed February 15, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Martin Downes, "Entrapment: The Emerging Church Conversation and the Cultural Captivity of the Gospel," 224-244, Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason eds., *Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), writes, "When this happens, the gospel becomes a lost message.... This does not mean that people are kept from hearing about Jesus, the good news, the Bible, or the cross. The words themselves may remain, but their content is altered by, and adapted to the dominant cultural worldview. And the frightening thing is that this can be done willingly and with the best of motives. In seeking to communicate the gospel to the culture it is possible for the church to be assimilated by the mindset of the culture." 224.

<sup>61</sup> Downes, "Entrapment," 226, 229-232.

environmentalism, delimit the work of Jesus to his moral and ethical teaching, and then dilute those ethics in order to placate and appeal to today's world.

One of the great gifts of Ron Gleason's recent studies in the life and work of Herman Bavinck is the record of the responses of the Dutch Reformed Church to nineteenth century modernism.<sup>62</sup> He compares the similarities of those responses with the tack taken by the ECM today.<sup>63</sup> Bavinck opened the 1905 school year at the Free University of Amsterdam with a lecture titled, "Learning and Science." He

warned students against the philosophy of positivism that had achieved a prominent place at the outset of the twentieth century. According to Bavinck, those enamored of positivism were urging its devotees to be about changing everything on the basis of the dictates of modern culture. Culture, it was urged was pointing to a new way—to a new development in which the older categories of thinking were now outmoded. All areas of life—school and science, marriage and family, state and society, religion and morality—needed to be revamped, reimagined. Proponents of this way of thinking were in more than adequate supply, Bavinck warned, and each one knew how things worked better than all the others. According to Bavinck, no one desired to be conservative any longer but rather opted for being radical, democratic, modern, 'up-to-date.' That was the new ideal toward which everyone strove.<sup>64</sup>

Bavinck was not against culture nor opposed to it. He was among the most learned and culturally engaged theologians of his day. His engagement with culture, like his comrade in arms, Abraham Kuyper, was from a "decidedly Reformed perspective and worldview." Unlike many in his day and in ours, "he was aware that whoever engaged culture would also be engaged back by culture. In order to have a

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<sup>62</sup> Ronald N. Gleason, *Herman Bavinck; Pastor, Churchman, Statesman and Theologian*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Ronald N. Gleason "Church and Community or Community and Church?" 166-187, Gary L.W. Johnson & Ronald N. Gleason, *Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, 349. This same struggle in the United States is seen in David Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Tradition, 1869-1929*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996) esp. pp. 273-398 detailing the desire of President Ross Stevenson to make Princeton more broad, modern, and inclusive and the reorganization of the Seminary that led to the exodus of J. Gresham Machen and others and the founding of Westminster Seminary.

permeating influence on the society in which he lived, it was necessary to have a firm Biblical response to cultural issues and the proverbial culture wars.”<sup>65</sup> This awareness appears sadly to be missing in the EMC’s engagement with culture. There is no decidedly Biblical worldview in the ECM. Without the traction that a Biblical worldview provides, theological slippage is bound to follow. This is D.A. Carson’s concern when he asks, “Is there at least some danger that what is being advocated is not so much a new kind of Christian in a new emerging church, but a church that is so submerging itself in the culture that it risks hopeless compromise?”<sup>66</sup> Charles Bridges spoke of our day as well as his own when he wrote, “Heresy is restrained by conceding supreme authority to the Bible. The crude professor acts under feverish impulse, a sickly sentimentalist in religion. Instead of retaining a firm hold on truth, he imbibes with ease in the most monstrous opinions.”<sup>67</sup>

Gleason’s commentary on the theological slippage of the Dutch church a century ago is a helpful summary of the dangers inherent in an uncritical cultural engagement in the cause of relevancy. The 1914 annual synod of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands opened with a call for more cultural relevancy in the new age:

The keynote speaker said that in order for the Reformed church to remain relevant in Holland, it had ‘to busy itself with seeking and finding new paths for both church and society.’ ...Interestingly, the astute student of church history can find this pattern and these sentiments repeated throughout the ages. Equally interesting are the statistics that point inexorably to the truth that when a church starts down such a path, the results are often disastrous. Those desiring to be creative or innovative in the church usually compromise the gospel somewhere along the line, and the same holds true for those who are intent on ‘engaging the culture.’ They fail to realize that the culture will engage you back, and you had better be more than prepared to deal with both

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<sup>65</sup> Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, 369.

<sup>66</sup> Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 [first pub. 1846]), 445.

the blatant aspects as well as the subtleties of unbelief... The problem, as is so often the case, was that the younger generation was adamant that a new direction, a new movement was required; they just weren't sure what it should look like or where it should go.<sup>68</sup>

### **Language Acquisition**

Since neither the audience-driven nor the cultural-determining model of preaching have proven trustworthy we move to the third option for Biblical-Missional preaching in *The Age of Mission*. In many ways the paradigm of language acquisition comes closest to meeting the criteria we are seeking to establish. This third approach is not as troublesome but neither is it wholly satisfying.

As in any cross-cultural communication encounter, the Church is going to need to learn the language and thought processes of the current mission field context before it will be able to make an impact on and helpfully engage it with the joyful good news. Those wishing to bring the good news to any new culture must not only learn the language, but they must learn to speak in a new language. The missional church must be bilingual—or multi-lingual.

One of the often unrealized challenges in seeking to be missional in our own home culture is that while the language of Christianity is often the heart language of the preacher who has grown up in this culture, the culture itself has moved away from a common use of that language. Dictionary entries will often list definitions of words according to common usage and then secondarily add usages and definitions, which are to be considered archaic or obsolete. This is where much of the vocabulary of Christendom is found in this post-Christian era. In still other cases language has lost its punch through over use:

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<sup>68</sup> Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, 409-410.

Just as learning a new language is necessary to learn [a new skill] so too we must learn again how to speak as Christians. One of the great problems, of course, is that many of the words used in Christian speech have become common. As a result, too often we have lost the oddness of Christian speech because we assume we are adequate speakers because such language is so familiar. The challenge is to rediscover how what we say as Christians forces a reconfiguration of our lives in order that we might see the world as God's good creation.<sup>69</sup>

Even a word as common as "church" conjures up a variety of images, not only among a variety of people, but within the mind of one listener. We usually think we know what we are talking about when we say 'church.' What is church? Voluntary association? The curia? All Christians? Those only on earth? The visible church, the invisible? A building, a communion, historically, geographically, what?<sup>70</sup> And what are we to do when the speaker and hearer are seeing differing images in the conversation?

At the same time it is imperative that acquiring a new language does not mean adopting a new worldview, one that is contrary to Scripture. The language of the present North American Post Christendom context is postmodernity. Learning to speak the language of postmodernity, without buying into its presuppositions and values will take careful navigation for today's preacher. It is possible to understand the philosophical or religious underpinnings of the language, appreciate some of its criticisms and viewpoints without buying into them order to be effective as a communicator. As Ian Pitt-Wilson rightly states, we need to "make the what of [our] preaching more important than the 'how.'"<sup>71</sup> The challenge is while speaking in the new language the core and particulars of the gospel are protected. New words and

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<sup>69</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991 [2d ed., 1999]), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 4-5.

<sup>71</sup> quoted in Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World, A guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 61.

ways might be employed but great care must be taken that the words and thought patterns of the new culture do not diminish or change the content of the message with which we are entrusted. Only then will we be able to bring a clear fresh rearticulating of the old message.<sup>72</sup> Os Guinness says that *it is impossible to stay absolutely conservative* simply because time does not stand still. An individual or group might manage to preserve something from one generation to the next or one worldview culture to another. But it may evolve into a different meaning, or perhaps no meaning at all, because of a new temporal setting. If we are not careful to understand the nature of cultural language we will be merely shouting<sup>73</sup> at people in a language which they cannot understand in an attempt to get the truth into them.

Lesslie Newbigin helps us understand the importance of learning the language, using the newly learned vocabulary correctly, and remaining able to speak with freshness and clarity into a mission setting.<sup>74</sup> Newbigin uses experience of any missionary who has been raised and immersed in one culture who seeks to communicate the gospel among a people of another culture. The missionary, preparing to go to a culture knows that this new world is one that “has been shaped by a vision of the totality of things quite different from that of the Bible. He must struggle to master the language.” But language is more than vocabulary and grammar. It is an expression of an entire history and heart and soul of a people. It is

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<sup>72</sup>Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 20. When Gibbs and Bolger speak of learning a new language they speak also of the medium for conveying the language. There seems to be a lack of distinction between message and medium. For a different perspective see also Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 91-116.

<sup>73</sup>We have all had the experience of persons shouting at one another in two different languages as though the raised voice will improve understanding and comprehension. For many people preaching is this kind of shouting.

<sup>74</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greek, The Gospel and Western Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986). The discussion that follows (pages 128-32) comes from pages 1-20.

filled with allusions to literature, folktales, geography, religion, and the formation of an entire people's psyche by its past struggles, defeats and victories in its engagement with the world that surrounds them. Newbigin is correct to use the word *struggle* to describe this process. It is a long struggle, it is hard work. It is also work that really never ends for the learner of a new language. Those who wish to speak into a culture that is foreign to them will need to be willing to work hard, even struggle to become effective communicators into the new culture.

Anyone who has spent time and work learning a new language knows that there are words, expressions, and idioms in the new language that make no sense when translated literally into one's own native tongue and vice versa. It is these idiomatic expressions that give vibrancy and color to the use of the language. It is facility with these expressions that allow the communicator to enter into the flow and stream of language and truly begins to communicate. Newbigin describes the process saying,

To begin with he will think of the words he hears simply as the equivalent of the words he uses in his own tongue and are listed in his dictionary as equivalents. But if he really immerses himself in the talk, the songs and folk tales, and the literature of the people, he will discover that there are no exact equivalents. All the words in any language derive their meaning in the minds of those who use them, from a whole world of experience...so...he has to render the message the best he can, drawing as fully as he can upon the tradition of the people to whom he speaks.<sup>75</sup>

There are three dangers for the communicator at this point. The first danger is in using the language as a foreigner, using the words without a proper understanding of their *meaning and nuances*. "...his message is heard as the babblings of a man who

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<sup>75</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 17.

really has nothing to say.”<sup>76</sup> Or, secondly, he will become so familiar with the words that he sounds like another moralist coming out of the culture. In the attempt to be ‘relevant’ one may fall into syncretism, but on the other hand in the effort to avoid syncretism one may become irrelevant.

The third danger is that of being unaware of the historical, cultural, emotional, and assumed meanings of any word or sets of words that the communicator has in his own native tongue. Just as the communicator must learn to recognize the nuances of the language of the receptor community, there must also be an awareness that the vocabulary of his own language carries with it nuances and shades of meaning from his own experiences and upbringing and even regional history that would never present themselves in a dictionary definition. One is never truly and completely aware of these nuances. More often than not there is the assumption that every one who uses the words uses them in the same way that the speaker does. Even as a communicator seeks to learn a second language there will be new awareness of the intricacies and varieties of usage in the mother tongue.<sup>77</sup>

Newbigin’s concern is that in the attempt to be understandable, relevant, clear and contextual, the true essence of the Gospel message is changed or even lost. Care

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<sup>76</sup> I have had the experience of trying to communicate with people in languages other than English thinking that I was saying something quite clearly only to discover that what I was saying was not at all what I thought I was saying because I was using improper pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, or syntax.

<sup>77</sup> An example of this from my own experience occurred when our (South Carolinian) son-in-law was visiting us on vacation in Maine. Like many towns and villages in New England, the town of Harpswell, Maine has a memorial obelisk for the Civil War dead. Our son-in-law was shocked to see the Civil War described on the memorial as “The War of the Great Rebellion.” While he may not have used the term “The war of the Northern aggression” as some Southerners do, he was nonetheless unprepared to see the war defined in these terms. Here we were two American citizens, born and bred in the same nation, though separated into divergent regions being encountered by opposing definitions of the same shared history. For either one of us to use the words Civil War would conjure different visions of the past and contrary rationales and goals for that war. Another example is my grown daughter who some how got the idea that “The State of the Union Address” was a speech honoring the best state in the Union!



must be taken that the message communicated or received as a message that is coming purely out of the speaker's own culture and worldview. As much as is possible the message of the apostles is to be presented in the receptor language with an understanding of the receptor's worldview. This is no mean task. Adolph Harnack wrote a century ago that the attempt of both the apostles and the early church fathers to make the message attractive and understandable to their world had clothed the gospel in the "thought forms of the day, especially those that were Hellenistic."<sup>78</sup> The result of this "baleful habit" was that the "absolute character of the Christian faith was polluted by its union with what was relative."<sup>79</sup> Whether or not Harnack was accurate in his assessments is not the point here, the point is that there is always a danger of presenting the gospel in a polluted or distorted form that is more a reflection of the presenter's worldview than the worldview of Scripture. The realization of this danger is not meant to paralyze or dissuade the presenter from speaking. It is a caution, however, to the issues involved in a proper presentation of the gospel as it goes from one worldview to another. Adding to this difficulty is the challenge of properly understanding and reflecting the world-view of the Bible as we take it from our worldview to the worldview of our listener.<sup>80</sup>

The task of the missional preacher is to continue to learn both the receptor language—with its nuances and cultural entailments, and grow in awareness that there are also nuances and cultural entailments to his own language that may cloud,

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<sup>78</sup> Wells, *No Place For Truth*, 118-119.

<sup>79</sup> Wells, *No Place For Truth*, 119.

<sup>80</sup> This is the concern and great help of John Stott, *Between Two Worlds, The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982). For a more abstract and technical overview of the necessity and difficulty of bridging the gap between the world of the Bible and the World of the preacher see also, Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

pollute, dilute or even radically change the intended message. Learning to speak so that even those who speak our own language hear us well means taking the time to talk to people in the pew when they are not in the pew. Haddon Robinson makes a point of teaching students to exegete the audience as well as exegeting the text.<sup>81</sup>

Newbigin makes the point in *Foolishness to the Greeks* that every language is culturally bound. The effective communicator needs to know both the cultural framework of his own language and as much as possible the cultural framework of the receptor's language. People need to hear the Gospel in their own language in order for it to be fully received.<sup>82</sup> This is even true of English speakers who are seeking to communicate to other English speakers who look like us, dress like us, work with us, and share the same hopes, dreams, and fears as we do. Even before we can answer the question of how one is to preach missionally in the Age of Mission we will need to make ourselves aware of the new language and mental framework that drives the language of its inhabitants. How are we to keep the unchanging truth unchanged while we change our own thinking and language for effective preaching?

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<sup>81</sup> See Haddon Robinson, "Preaching to Everyone in Particular," 119-128 and "Listening to Your Listeners," 129-135, in *Making a Difference in Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> A. A. Miller, *Alexander Duff of India*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1992), Quotes Alexander Duff who made this impassioned plea for indigenous preachers: "Oh, there is that in the tones of a foreigner's voice which falls cold and heavy on the ear of the native and seldom reaches the heart!—whereas, there is something in the tones of a countryman's voice, which, operating as a charm, falls pleasantly on the ear, and comes home to the feelings and touches the heart, and causes its tenderest chords to vibrate. Doubtless there have been, and there may be now, individual cases of foreigners having in some degree, or even altogether, surmounted this grand practical difficulty. but these rare cases form such a palpable exceptions to the rule, that they can scarcely be counted on, in providing a national supply of preachers if the everlasting gospel. Thus, again, is the comparative inefficiency of European agency, when put forth directly in proclaiming the gospel, forced upon the mind; and the necessity of having recourse to native agents in the work is once more suggested with a potency that is restless.... they can locate themselves amid the hamlets and villages, they can hold intercourse with their countrymen in ways and modes that we never can. And having the thousand advantages, besides, of knowing the feelings, the sentiments, the traditions, the associations, the habits, the manners, the custom, the trains of thought and principles of reasoning among the people, they can strike in with arguments, and objections, and illustrations, and imagery which we could have never, never have conceived." 74-75.

There is a real danger here that the content of the message is changed by the language we use, or that the language itself gets confused with medium of communication.

This confusion is seen in Gibbs and Bolger who tell us,

Faithful mission practice requires an understanding of the *language* of culture. Unfortunately, the church has been slow to adopt new communication technologies. Far from being faddish, these technologies are the very essence of how people today construct their worlds. It is here that the church may be most out of step with culture. The Reformation contextualized the gospel for the print era, but there has been no corresponding reformation to bring the gospel to our image-based era. The church continues to communicate a verbal, linear, and abstract message to a culture whose primary language consists of sound, visual images and experience, in addition to words.... Current patterns and styles of preaching communicate with diminishing impact. Pastors must understand the comprehensive nature of language to be heard by the culture.<sup>83</sup>

There is still another frustration in language acquisition—language is fluid and always changing. As soon as we become comfortable with the language new words and ways of expressions are invented or evolve from the older patterns.

Newbigin related his own experience with learning Tamil as a new missionary in India:

...we soon got into a steady routine of eight hours of hard study [of Tamil] every day. It was a struggle but we made progress and by March, I was able to risk chairing a meeting and giving a short address. The shattering problem was the vast gulf between the literary Tamil of our teacher and the ordinary language of the street and the shop. One had to learn both and, and sometimes they seemed different languages.<sup>84</sup>

And again after two additional years of study he writes,

There was a vast amount of learning to be done. Many hours a day had to be given to Tamil.... And one does not just 'pick up' a language like Tamil: it requires very hard work for several years.... [However] as I progressed I realized that [my teacher's] noble Brahmin Tamil was being replaced among the younger generation by a new style of language which sought to eliminate all

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<sup>83</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 20.

<sup>84</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda, An Autobiography*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 42-43.

traces of [the older style]...One could not ignore the movement and I was able to get a [younger teacher] to teach me the new style. One had to learn to speak and write in both styles, and to know when to do which.<sup>85</sup>

Our goal is to preach as the apostles did on the day of Pentecost so that our hearers (even those Schleiermacher called the 'cultured despisers of the gospel') will be bewildered, astonished, and amazed (Acts 2:6,7) because they are hearing the message in their own language from those whom they would have never thought would know, understand or care about speaking to them in their own cultural language.<sup>86</sup> We realize that all of our learning and all of our cautions and all of our best attempts will only be as effective as they are empowered and used by the Holy Spirit who enabled those first preachers.<sup>87</sup> We cannot allow ourselves to be so concerned about language acquisition that there is little confidence in our ability to preach so that we say nothing at all. Using the language we have to preach will expand our ability as well as our confidence. We will see that the combination of the enabling of the Holy Spirit and the confidence that comes from our call and the message we preach is even more important than a perfect delivery. The proclamation of the gospel cannot be limited by or changed by the strictures of the receptor language. Can we not also ask for and assume the same power of the Holy Spirit that enabled the multi-cultural and multi-lingual audience the ability to hear on the Day of Pentecost to enable our hearers when our best efforts fall short of perfect language use? The receptor language must be learned and used, but it must also be expanded in

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<sup>85</sup> Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 53-54.

<sup>86</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 89. "In amazement the people point out that those who are speaking are 'Galileans (7a)... Three times we are told that the disciples spoke in the people's 'own language' (cf. vv. 6, 8, 11). This refers to the vernacular languages of the people rather than to the Greek that the Jews of the dispersion would have known."

<sup>87</sup> C. Richard Wells and A. Boyd Luter, *Inspired Preaching. A Survey of Preaching Found in the New Testament*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2002), 92 for this insight.

order that that the gospel is truly heard, received and can be acted upon. As Paul expanded and redefined forever the vocabulary of *Koine* Greek, so too we may redefine the words we use in our proclamation.<sup>88</sup>

### **A Biblical Approach**

None of the three approaches we have considered for effective preaching in a missional setting begin with the Bible's own testimony and examples of preaching in its Age of Mission. Whatever their individual strengths and weaknesses they each one is hampered by being man-centered in approach. None takes into consideration that God has something to say about the methodology as well as the message that we proclaim. Arturo Azurdia agrees, "If we are consumed with the desire to accomplish the 'greater works' promised by Jesus Christ, then no other alternative exists but a return to the methods and means prescribed by God Himself."<sup>89</sup> There are eight areas or categories for preaching that can be identified in the book of Acts that will be used to define Biblical Preaching in an Age of Mission for this paper. While there is far more that can be said by addressing the whole of the New Testament it is hoped that this narrow study will set the stage for further thinking. The eight areas that will be explored are:

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<sup>88</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 96. Pentecost, then, gives us a hint of how the revolutionary breaking of social and other barriers by the gospel will work out in practical life. "The implications are immense. As we take the gospel to the peoples of the world we should not expect people to subject themselves to a language like English (which is today what Greek was to the first century). We need to learn the heart language of people and to share the gospel with them in that language. All the advances of technology are no substitute to the hard work of identifying with a culture and learning to understand and appreciate its distinctives—hard work indeed in a culture that values efficiency so highly and tries so hard to eliminate frustration. (Parag.) Yet while we work hard to present the gospel in culturally appropriate ways, we should never isolate any Christian from the church in the rest of the world. We must show them that they are part of a large worldwide family, who share a deep unity in diversity that will outlast all barriers..."

<sup>89</sup> Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, A Mentor Imprint, 1998), 32.

1. Trinitarian Foundations for Preaching (See Appendix 1 for additional material)
2. The Words used to Describe Preaching in Acts
3. The Content and Meaning of the Gospel in Acts
4. Attitude toward the Audience
5. Attitude toward Scripture
6. Confidence in Preaching
7. Emotions in Preaching
8. The Rationality in Preaching

### **Trinitarian Foundations for Preaching: God-Centered**

God is the foundation of Biblical preaching. We preach because God has spoken. True preaching is a continuation of the self-revelation of God to us. There is a stark contrast between the blessedness of the God who has revealed Himself and the mute gods of the nations. When Moses boldly, even presumptuously, asks to see God's glory, God answers by speaking his name and naming his attributes. He then spends the next forty days telling Moses how his people are to live and how he is to be worshiped. The Psalmist tells us that it is by God's blessing that we have his law (Word). He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD! (Psalm 147:19). This call to praise echoes God's own declaration of the goodness of his revelation to the people of Israel:

For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? (Deuteronomy 4:32-35)

God has spoken and we who are created in his image are given the gift of speech, and so we speak too. However, as Paul David Tripp reminds us we cannot

...really understand the significance of words until [we] realize that the first that human ears ever heard were not the words of another human being but the words of

God! The value of every piece of human communication is rooted in the fact that *God* speaks.... When God chose to reveal himself [in human language], he raised talk to a place of highest significance as his primary vehicle of truth.<sup>90</sup>

It is through His words that God defines His “character, his will, his plan and purpose, and his truth.”<sup>91</sup> The God of Glory has condescended to graciously reveal Himself through language to us for our good, but ultimately for His own glory. When we speak, the highest use of words is for the same use—the Glory of God. God is glorified most in our words when the Good News is proclaimed through preaching. Just as God’s words explain and define, and give us windows through which God is seen,<sup>92</sup> our preaching is meant to open the windows of people’s minds and hearts as we seek to define, explain, and reveal God and life in the world he has given us.

Tripp is not speaking specifically of preaching when he writes the following, but every preacher should think carefully about this point:

God has unlocked the doors of truth to us, using his words as his key. The only reason we understand anything is that he has spoken. Words belong to God, but he has lent them to us so that we might know him and be used by him. This means that words do not belong to us. Every word we speak must be up to God’s standard and according to his design. They should echo God the Great Speaker and reflect his glory. When we lose sight of this, our words lose their only shelter from difficulty. Talk was created by God for *his* purpose. Our words belong to him.<sup>93</sup>

The One whom God has sent to unlock the greatest mysteries of Himself for us, the One who identified himself as the Way to the Father is himself called the Word. God has spoken. God has revealed himself to us in words and in the Word

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<sup>90</sup> Paul David Tripp, *War on Words*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2000), 8.

<sup>91</sup> Tripp, *War on Words*, 9.

<sup>92</sup> Tripp, *War on Words*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> Tripp, *War on Words*, 15.

written and through the Eternal Word made flesh. We image the Creator by using words in the same way. Preaching is a God-driven activity. We are driven by the desire to make Him better known, we are driven by the focus to use our words rightly and honorably, we are driven to be more like Him in our speech.

At the same time, the self-revelation of God limits our proclamation. Driven by the motivation to reveal the revealing God we must stop short at revealing only as much as he has revealed. Preaching is not speculation. It is exposition. Albert Mohler writes, “Our God-talk must...begin and end with what God has said concerning himself. Preaching is not the business of speculating about God’s nature, will, or ways, but is bearing witness of what he has spoken concerning himself.”<sup>94</sup> When we listen to the apostolic preachers this is what we hear. We hear God declared, explained, proven, exposed, worshipped—but never speculated.

God is not only the fountain of speech; he is the focus of preaching in Acts. In his first sermon Peter says,

- “God declares,”
- “Jesus a man attested to you by God,”
- “According to the plan and foreknowledge of God.”
- “God raised him up,”
- “God had sworn,”
- “God raised him up...he is exalted to the right hand of God,”
- “God has made him both Lord and Christ,” and
- “Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself”<sup>95</sup>

In his speech, following the healing of the lame man, Peter refers to God nine times in fifteen verses.<sup>96</sup> This same emphasis is repeated when Peter and John make their defense before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4: 10, 19, 21).

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<sup>94</sup> R. Albert Mohler, *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 40-41.

<sup>95</sup> Acts 2:17, 22, 23, 24, 30, 32, 33, 39.



In the opening chapters of Acts, Peter tells the story of God and his eternal purposes (2:23; 3:18; 4:28), his fulfillment of prophecy (2:16-21; 25-28; 34; 3:18, 22, 24, 25; 4:25), and His power over the grim enemy death (2:24,31, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:31). When Ananias and Sapphira lie about their land sale, it is God to whom they lie (5:4). God the Creator, the initiator, the gracious One, the power over all events and people is the main character in the early preaching. It is God who is the source of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it is God who receives credit for the healing of the lame man, it is God who is to be obeyed as the highest authority, it is God who is praised at the release of the Apostles, and it is God who is appealed to for additional boldness in witness. He is meant to be the main character in our preaching, too. He is the center of reality and is to be the center of our preaching.<sup>97</sup>

Stephen continues this God-centeredness in his rehearsal of Israel's history as he defends himself against the false accusations of the council (7:2, 6,7, 17, 20, 25, 30, 31, 35, 37, 42, 46, 56). When Philip confronts and disarms Simon Magus of his occult power it is God who receives credit. Unlike Simon, who boasted of himself, Peter preaches the power of the Kingdom of God (8:21). When the Gentiles receive the Good News it is God who sends for Peter, it is God who opens Peter's heart, and it is God who is said not to be a respecter of persons. Peter tells the story of Jesus whom God anointed and who had God's protecting presence (10:38). It is God who raised Christ from the dead, chose the apostles as witnesses, commanded them to

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<sup>96</sup> This does not include the word Lord.

<sup>97</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 116, points out that there are 2,930 different Bible characters. With one exception, Jesus Christ, none are meant to be examples to us of perfect behavior, but lessons of how God interacts with imperfect human beings in order to get glory for himself and to accomplish his redemptive purposes.

preach. It is God who appointed Christ as supreme Judge (10:40-42). Later before the rest of the apostles Peter asks “If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who was I to stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17).

Paul’s first fully recorded sermon<sup>98</sup> in Acts 13 has the same themes of God’s pre-temporal purposes (v.17), messianic promise and fulfillment (v.23), Christ’s life and crucifixion (vv. 27, 28), and his resurrection (vv. 30, 33, 34). When Paul preaches to the Greeks in Athens he changes very little of his content focusing again on God as Creator (17:24), who is self-sufficient (v. 25), and sovereignly rules over men and nations (v. 26). His sermon is rejected when he tells of the resurrection,<sup>99</sup> Paul ends the sermon with the hope and invitation that his listeners will seek the God whom he has preached to them (17:21).

The foundation for Biblical Preaching in the Age of Mission shown to us in the Book of Acts is God. It is God who has spoken and revealed himself to us. We proclaim the self-disclosing God. All preaching that is true preaching will flow from this fountainhead. We do not preach as self-appointed heralds but as representatives of this God. We preach because we cannot be silent—as God cannot be silent.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> For the purposes of the paper, the speeches in Acts are all received as true accounts or at the very least accurate summaries of what was said at the time. The notion that Luke has placed his own words on the lips of the Apostle is unsustainable and is rejected here. See Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 28-29, John R. W. Stott, *The Spirit, The Church & The World*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 69-72.

<sup>99</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 477. Because we believe that the sermons in Acts are “at the very least accurate summaries” of what was spoken by the Apostles, we can assume when they speak of the resurrection of Christ that the death of Christ was mentioned as well.

<sup>100</sup> Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 42.

We preach God because God is not only the first speaker, but because God has made himself the main character of Scripture, “the hero of every text.”<sup>101</sup> He is the focal point of each text and the focal point of all of the Scriptures. Sidney Greidanus calls this the Bible’s “theocentric purpose.”<sup>102</sup> In approaching every text, we need to ask “what is this text trying to tell me about God?” This is important to grasp because the emphasis of popular contemporary evangelicalism is often on pragmatic lessons and applications taken from the lives of Biblical characters more often than it is seeking to answer the theocentric question. This is also important to remember because of the influential homiletic theory that stresses the supremacy of Jesus Christ and his work as the focal point of every text and application.<sup>103</sup> If we put God the Father and his work first and the place of Christ in that work will naturally follow.

Even so, why in an age of many gods, privatized faith, agnosticism, and blatant atheism would we begin with God? How do God’s self-revelation and our attempts at revealing the revealer work in a missional setting? In the era of the New Testament the Apostles faced a variety of theisms just as we shall in any Age of

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<sup>101</sup> Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with our Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 236. The God-centeredness of God in Scripture is a constant theme in the writings of John Piper. For example see John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Mediations on God’s Delight in Being God*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 1991, 2000), and *God is the Gospel: Mediations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005). My own approach to both hermeneutics and preaching were revolutionized when I read Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher, and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988).

<sup>102</sup> Greidanus, *Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 113-118.

<sup>103</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, The concern here is not that Greidanus is speaking out of both sides of his mouth, but that an over emphasis on the supremacy of God makes us Unitarians while an over emphasis on Jesus diminishes a full appreciation for the Gift that the Father himself is to his people. It also diminishes the activity of the entire Godhead in the work of redemption. For a fully developed Christ-centered homiletic theory and application see Bryan Chappel, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005). I am thankful for this insight from my friend Donnie Colombo.

Mission. To the Jewish audience who believed deeply and piously, the apostles declared both the known words of God and re-interpreted the works of God, in the distant past of the Old Testament and the more recent past of the life of Christ. Speaking to the Gentiles, the preachers' declaration began with an assumption of the existence and work of God. Because of the scientific and technological hegemony in a culture founded on the smug denial of God's existence it is tempting to think that a new approach for preaching needs to be developed. One that seeks to build a system of proof for the existence of God before his Word and works are declared.<sup>104</sup> Before any new approach to or system of preaching is developed, however, we must take seriously that the Bible, written to people of all times and places, always assumes God. He is never proven. As an example of the proclamation of God to an audience that did not share the Biblical worldview of God we have Paul's sermon in Acts 17. Neither the Stoics nor the Epicureans believed in a fully powerful, personal, engaged, creator God,<sup>105</sup> and yet Paul bypasses the opportunity to prove God, or disprove their faulty theology, and instead launches into a description of the demands of the God of the Bible. He assumes God. The preacher does not need to spend great amount of time spent proving God. However, when the focus is evangelistic and the audience is

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<sup>104</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), writes, "For three centuries now, atheists and skeptics have catechized the West in the belief that as cultures progress, belief in God or at least in extraordinary divine intervention in nature and history will wane."

<sup>105</sup> Ralph Stob, "Stoicism and Christianity" *Classical Journal* 30 (1934-1935), 217-224. Stob flatly denies any connection between the god of Stoicism, which is not transcendent but "only immanent and...impersonal and immaterial." When Paul refers to God as the creator of all that there is, he is contradicting nearly all of Greek philosophy. Stoicism would not have taught a vital distinction between its god and man. More pantheistic than Biblical the Stoic Epictetus wrote "You are a fragment of God, you have within you a part of him." Epicures denied the existence of God as the Bible reveals Him by use of a logical formulation known as the Epicurean Riddle: *God is all-powerful. God is perfectly good. Evil exists. If God exists, there would be no evil. Therefore God does not exist.* 219.

primarily skeptical or hostile, more apologetic material may be appropriate. Because we find that the sermons in Acts are God-focused; ours should be too.

### **Trinitarian Foundations for Preaching: Christ-Exalting**

The God who is proclaimed in Acts is the Triune God of the entire Bible. The preaching of the Apostles is Trinitarian from the Day of Pentecost onward. The first sermon in Acts is Trinitarian. In it Peter refers to the Holy Spirit, both God the Father and Jesus the Son equally as *kyrios*, and Jesus as Lord who has taken on divine functions, such as pouring out the Spirit (v. 33) and being the object of faith. “Here in the earliest Christology of the primitive church are the beginnings of Trinitarian theology, although they are not reflected upon. Implicit in the recognition of the Lordship of Jesus is the acknowledgment of his essential deity.”<sup>106</sup>

The emphasis is not only on God the Almighty Creator but also on the Eternal Son, Jesus the Christ, and the sent and empowering Holy Spirit. The apostles are quick to identify Jesus the man as Jesus the Chosen One (Messiah) in the early sermons in Acts. But more importantly they identify Jesus as God. On Pentecost Jesus is described as the one attested by God (Acts 2:22), delivered up, crucified and killed (23), raised from the dead (24, 32), and exalted to the right hand of God (33). In what Donald Guthrie calls “one of the most significant statements in the book of Acts,” Peter tells his audience that God has declared him both Lord (God) and Christ (2:36). He shares ultimate sovereignty with the Father. He is God.<sup>107</sup> In verse 27

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<sup>106</sup> George Ladd quoted by Fernando, *Acts*, 105.

<sup>107</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981). “One of the most significant statement in Acts is in Peter’s first sermon. The climax was reached with the declaration in 2:36 has ‘God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ The linking of lordship with messiah-ship is important, especially at the early stage. Lordship here is undoubtedly an ascription of sovereignty in vivid contrast to the crucified Jesus. It was this contrast

Peter does not hesitate to apply to Jesus the title “Holy One” taken from Psalm 16. Later, in Acts 13, Peter refers to Jesus as the “Holy and Righteous One”<sup>108</sup> and the “Author of Life.” While these titles may not be explicit references to deity, they are part of a list of titles that “speak of the uniqueness of Jesus.”<sup>109</sup>

In Acts 3 and 4 when Peter explains his part, or non-part, in the healing of the lame man he focuses on the name of Jesus and strings together a cluster of titles that are linked by the eight references to “the Name” (3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18, 30). “These titles speak to the uniqueness of Jesus in his sufferings and glory, his character and mission, his revelation and redemption. All of this is encapsulated in his ‘Name’ and helps to explain its saving power.”<sup>110</sup> Peter deflects praise from himself by “directing the crowd’s attention away from both the healed cripple and the apostles to the Christ whom men disowned by killing him, but whom God vindicated by raising him” from the dead.<sup>111</sup> This sermon is remarkable both for its Christ-centeredness and for its use of “The Name,” which any pious Jew would have heard as a “surrogate for God” and would have “connoted his divine presence and power.”<sup>112</sup> The emphasis is on the current ongoing life of Christ following the resurrection, a pattern that is seen in every one of the apostolic sermons. The apostolic preaching is not merely Christ-centered it is resurrection-centered. It is

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that caused the strong reaction among the hearers.” 294 In 10:36 Peter refers to Jesus as Lord of all “This is a remarkably comprehensive view of the lordship of Jesus, implying full sovereignty.” 295.

<sup>108</sup> While this may not be explicitly a reference to deity, it is at the very least an implicit description of sinlessness, and by extension, perhaps his deity. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 231. I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles, In Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 90, and F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 88. Both of these commentators play down the divine significance of these titles.

<sup>109</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church & The World*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 92.

<sup>110</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church & The World*, 92-93.

<sup>111</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church & The World*, 93.

<sup>112</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 140.

only in knowing and accepting the fact of the resurrection that the incarnation is conceivable. Without the resurrection we have either a divine being who never really became a man and could not have died, or we have a man who was not God and could not rise from the dead to continuous life.<sup>113</sup> Neither option brings good news. The apostles constantly point to Jesus and show him to be the living Savior of the World.<sup>114</sup> If we are going to follow their example we must never forget the proclamation that Christ is risen!<sup>115</sup>

Christ's life, death, and resurrection are not presented as a disjointed series of events. Jesus' coming, his suffering, his death, and his resurrection are all connected back to the eternal purpose and plan of God foretold by the prophets (Acts 2:23, 3:17, 18, 21; 5:18; 10:42). Stephen (7:2-50) and Paul (13:13-42; 22-31) both connect the coming of Christ with the plan of God and the full flow of redemptive history. We live in an a-historical age in the West that denigrates the past in favor of the new and modern. At the same time it is influenced by a cyclical understanding of history from the East. Because of this, the linkage between Christ as the center of our preaching and the God who foreordained his coming must be secured. No other religion vying for people's attention offers this dual rootedness in the eternal design of God and the specifics of a time-space occurrence. Christianity stands unique holding firmly to an historical person and the events in his life. It falls if he did not exist or the events that have been recorded of his life are proven false. Facts, events, and narratives need to have an historical point of reference. This is especially true in an age of pluralism

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<sup>113</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 390.

<sup>114</sup> James Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 64

<sup>115</sup> The work of the atonement accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ are not being ignored here. It will be picked up in the section dealing with the content of the Gospel in apostolic preaching.

and subjectivity. Without an historical reference point the stories of the Bible become mere delivery systems for moral lessons or vehicles to transport ethical principles.<sup>116</sup> Lesslie Newbigin tells of the astonishment of a Hindu friend who discovered that he was willing to rest the whole of his faith upon the historicity of the New Testament record. For the Hindu it was inconceivable that such important issues such as religious truth could be allowed to rest on something as fuzzy and hazy as history.<sup>117</sup> The true identity of God, the definition of what it means to be human, the mission of the church, and the future of creation are all tied together in the structure of resurrection faith.<sup>118</sup>

A vibrant and faithful Christ-centered, resurrection-declaring proclamation is necessary to counter those who would say that Christianity needs no historical anchor, needs no supernatural, and needs no resurrection. Only resurrection preaching can give hope to the materialist who denies the spiritual, the existentialist who denies meaning, the pluralist who denies objectivity, the post-modernist who rejects certainty, and the new-age believer in reincarnation who seeks a better life the next time around. People are not helped by those who contend that “Christian faith...is possible apart from the resurrection... in particular, and life beyond bodily death in general, and because of the widespread skepticism regarding these traditional beliefs, they should be presented as optional.”<sup>119</sup> Paul, on the other hand, is never hesitant to place the resurrection at the forefront of his preaching. Preaching

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<sup>116</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 113-114.

<sup>117</sup> Leslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ*, (Richmond: John Knox, 1969), excerpted in *Lesslie Newbigin Missionary Theologian, A Reader*, Paul Weston compiler and editor, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 55-6, quoted by Fernando, *Acts*, 114.

<sup>118</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *That All May Believe: A Theology of the Gospel and the Mission of the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 104.

<sup>119</sup> For example: David Griffin, *A Process Christology* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 12 quoted in Braaten, *That All may Believe*, 104.



to pagan philosophers in Athens Paul both risks rejection and then receives it from his audience when he declares the resurrection before the Areopagus.<sup>120</sup> It is quite likely that he would have known that when the “ancient Council of the Areopagus had been established centuries before, it was founded on the premise that ‘when a man dies, the earth drinks up his blood, there is no resurrection’.”<sup>121</sup>

When Paul is before the Sanhedrin (23:6) he again risks rejection and the deaf ear of his audience by proclaiming his hope in the resurrection. It was necessary for Paul to begin with the general concept of resurrection in order to make the claim of the Resurrection of Christ. The ensuing turmoil did not help Paul’s cause before the council. However, he clearly made the point that the Resurrection was the focal point of the Christian faith. For the Apostles there was no Christian faith without the Resurrection as a space-time event. We must preach with the same commitment to the Resurrection that is heard in Paul’s declaration, “If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (I Cor. 15:17)

When Philip takes the good news to Samaria, it is called “preaching the Word” and the “good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.” (8:4, 12) In the same chapter Philip told the Eunuch “the good news about

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<sup>120</sup> Paul already referred to the resurrection in his public preaching in the *agora*. It is possible that his hearers misunderstood him and thought that he was talking about two separate deities, Jesus and *Anastasin*. Their response, “He seems to be advocating foreign deities” (plural) seems to suggest this interpretation.. This suggestion was first made by Chrysostom and has been advocated by many commentators since. See Stott, *The Spirit, the World & the Church*, 282. Paul is brought before the Areopagus because that council heard the claims of deities whose worshippers wished to have them included in the Pantheon on the Acropolis. Bruce Winter, “Paul’s Paradigm for Preachers” 93-105, in *Preach the Word, Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 98. “It was the role of the Council of the Areopagus, exercised for centuries, to admit foreign divinities into Athens, a right they continued to exercise under the Romans (they diplomatically admitted emperors and sometimes the family members as ‘god’).”

<sup>121</sup> Winter, “Paul’s Paradigm for Preachers,” 100.

Jesus.” (8:35). Peter’s sermon in the house of Cornelius, though not based on a specific Old Testament text, is a clear announcement of the Gospel of Jesus. Peter tells his Gentile audience that Jesus was baptized, anointed by the Holy Spirit, taught, healed, was crucified, and rose again. Furthermore, it is by faith in the name of Jesus that forgiveness of sins is received (10:34-43). In the early dispersion church, Christians testified to both Jews and Gentiles “preaching the Lord Jesus” (11:19-20). This is the apostles’ teaching to which the early church devoted itself (2:42), and this message of “Jesus as the Christ” was the unceasing center of the Apostles’ teaching and preaching (5:42).

### **Trinitarian Foundations for Preaching: Holy Spirit-Empowered**

The Trinitarian nature of the preaching of Acts is most clearly seen in the manifest presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who is both promised and sent in the opening verses of the book. One cannot miss the emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit<sup>122</sup> in the preaching of Acts. Indeed the Holy Spirit is so central to the entire story of the Acts of the Apostles that it has been suggested by some commentators that the proper title for this history of the nascent church could easily be “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>123</sup> John Stott agrees that this suggested re-titling is understandable, since we find throughout the book the promise, gift, outpouring, baptism, fullness, power, witness and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It would be impossible to explain the

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<sup>122</sup> The Holy Spirit is mentioned 41 times, The Spirit 70 times, and the Spirit of God 2 times in Acts.

<sup>123</sup> John Stott, *The Spirit, The Church & The World*, 33 tells us that Johann Albrecht Bengel proposed this title in the eighteenth century and it was popularized by A. T. Pierson in his commentary published in 1895. “This book we may, perhaps, venture to call the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, for from first to last it is the record of his advent and activity. Here is seen coming and working.... But [only] one true Actor and Agent is here recognized, all other so-called actors and workers being merely his instrument, an agent being one who acts, an instrument being that through which he acts.” Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, 30, repeats this suggestion as well.

progress of the gospel apart from the work of the Spirit. However, Stott cautions against this renaming, since even while it emphasizes the action of the Divine Agent it threatens to under-emphasize or overlook the agency of the apostles as the human agents through whom the Holy Spirit worked.<sup>124</sup> This proposed re-titling overlooks the fact that Luke himself writes that his book is an account of the continuing acts of the risen Christ: continuing acts of Christ that are empowered by the Holy Spirit and carried forth by the apostles.

When we seek guidance in the Book of Acts for preaching in the Age of Mission, we take seriously the primacy of the Holy Spirit in the task.<sup>125</sup> We are barely into Luke's history when he introduces the risen Lord's promise of the coming Spirit. The Spirit will baptize the disciples and give power for witness of the good news to the whole world (1:5,8). The promise is realized and fulfilled on Pentecost with both sight and sound. Noisily and visibly the Holy Spirit comes and possesses the fearful and expectant disciples as they wait in prayer. It is when the Holy Spirit comes and fills the disciples with new power that the proclamation of the good news is inaugurated. We see an almost inconceivable transformation in these men. The same men who huddled behind the closed doors of the upper room anxiously wondering if the news of the resurrection were true are now in the streets boldly declaring its reality. And why? The empowering of the Holy Spirit. While we do

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<sup>124</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church & The World*, 30.

<sup>125</sup> Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching, Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), "I would hope that anyone writing a Christian book believes in the work of the Spirit in preaching! What seems to be happening though, is that books on preaching do not contain a large emphasis on the matter. It seems like the Spirit is often assumed in preaching books and in homiletics classes, and left to the theologians to discuss. But the subject of preaching...cannot be taught without an emphasis on pneumatology.... An over emphasis on the mechanics of preaching has led to a de-emphasis in this necessity for preaching. If we continue to assume something for a long period of time, eventually it becomes forgotten, ignored, or disbelieved." 45-46. See Appendix 3.

not have individualized accounts for each of the apostles, we do have the metamorphic difference in Peter, who had gone from brash confidence to bitter tears on the night of Christ's betrayal. Equally remarkable is the change in the threat-breathing, bounty-hunting Saul who becomes Paul. Paul becomes one who would willingly give up his own life in order that his countrymen might bow to his Lord (Romans 9:1-3). The same Spirit of Jesus who made Stephen's sermon unanswerable is the dynamo energizing Paul.<sup>126</sup> It is by the Spirit that Paul is called and by whom the scales that blinded him to the truth are removed. We immediately see Paul in his new persona preaching, amazing his hearers, and confounding his opponents. In addition, Paul is changed from an ethno-centric Pharisee to an *ethne*-loving world Christian (Ephesians 2:14; 3:1)<sup>127</sup> sent out by the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:15; 3:1ff).<sup>128</sup> The reversal of the curse of Babel on Pentecost<sup>129</sup> and in the missionary life of Paul are but two consequential blessings of the Spirit sent and received.

The book of Acts shows us both the availability of the Holy Spirit in our ongoing mission and the necessity of His power as the antidote for impotent preaching. We are no more able to carry out the commission to herald the coming of the new king and His reign without the Spirit than were the apostles. Not only are

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<sup>126</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul, A Study in the Development of Paul's Character*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949 [first copyright 1909]), 60-61.

<sup>127</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 435ff.

<sup>128</sup> Bruce, *Paul*, 140, 206-208.

<sup>129</sup> Dennis E. Johnston, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997), 60. "First, this miracle of languages, which united representatives of the nations in hearing the wonders of God, marked a reversal of the brokenness in human language that began at Babel (Gen 11:1-9). Part of what 'falls apart' in this world is language, which tends to divide the peoples of the earth, breeding suspicion, misunderstanding, and frustration.... this [judgment] is a result of human arrogance and resistance to God's command to fill the earth.... Pentecost signaled the reversal of the judgment, a drawing together of people 'from every nation that is under heaven' (Acts 2:5), not to erect a monument to their own pride, but to glorify God for his salvation."

we dependent on the Spirit for ability, we are properly motivated for the work only by the Spirit's prompting. F. F. Bruce says that one of the results of the giving of the Holy Spirit "was an urge to bear public and personal witness that Jesus the Crucified one had been vindicated by God, and to proclaim forgiveness, and the blessings of the new age thus inaugurated for all who yielded their allegiance to him."<sup>130</sup> This urge becomes a compulsion in Paul and all who follow in accepting the call to preach and feeling its necessity (I Cor. 9:16).<sup>131</sup>

Certainly one of the first steps toward gaining the power of the Holy Spirit in our preaching is the humble awareness of our own impotence and the desperate condition of our hearers. Is it not only in our weakness that God is shown to be strong? We rightly give credit to the Holy Spirit in the transformation in both Peter after Pentecost and Paul after the Damascus road. We need to see also that both of these men were brought down to humility—one to bitter tears and the other to blindness. Stott asks, "Why does the power of the Spirit seem to be so powerless? I strongly suspect that the main reason is our pride. In order to be filled with the Spirit

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<sup>130</sup> Johnston, *The Message of Acts*, 93.

<sup>131</sup> The preacher alone has no capacity to true and eternal change. We forget too easily and too soon that our very nature as sin-damaged human beings renders each one of us feeble and unfit for the work of heralding the good news. We do not depend on the Holy Spirit in our preaching because we either forget or are not truly convinced of the depth and reality of our sin-fueled inability. The preacher can only preach to the extent that he is conscious of the "full-orbed implications of the nature of sinful humanity." The necessity of having the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in preaching is actually doubly imperative, since it is not only the fallenness of the preacher but also the sinful nature of the ones being called to hear the sermon. We may err here as preachers by not remembering that it is the preacher who is fallen as well as *every listener* both believing and unbelieving. "...we must be aware of the sinfulness of both unbelievers and believers. We rightfully call upon God to do what only he can do in opening hard hearts, blind eyes and stopped ears so the unbeliever will be converted. Do we at the same time take into account the "residue of indwelling sin, the enticements of the evil one, and the rebellion of God's people [that] make it so hard for the Word to stick"? Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching* 52 quoting Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, A Mentor Imprint, 1998), 13. John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, reminds us that we must never rely on our own natural gifts as preachers but to always remember the "pitiable condition of people without Christ and the frightening strength and skill of the principalities and powers arrayed against us." 328.

we have first to acknowledge our emptiness.”<sup>132</sup> No matter what we believe of the Holy Spirit’s work and power ongoing or intermittent, we must never cease to believe that His work is to exalt Christ and to illumine the Word. Only as far as we are willing to remove ourselves from self-exaltation and illuminating our gifts will the way be opened for the power we need.<sup>133</sup>

### Vocabulary Used to describe Preaching in Acts

A variety of different words are used in Acts to describe the oral communication of the Good News of God to an audience.<sup>134</sup> The Holy Spirit does not limit the vocabulary pool only to preach, herald, or proclaim. The content of the message, the diversity in the men called to preach, the variety of the kinds of audiences (both individuals and groups), and the multiplicity of preaching settings seem to require this broad range of terms. The apostles proclaim the coming of the King and his kingdom, announce the dawn of a new age, tell the story of God’s love and work for mankind, teach the one way to God, declare the message as true, set out the purposes of God, explain how all of the Scriptures point to Christ, testify to their experience, and exhort their listeners to repentance from sin and acceptance of life in Christ. The speakers, the settings, and the specific content of individual

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<sup>132</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 329-330.

<sup>133</sup> See Appendix 3 The Holy Spirit in Preaching: *Unction*.

<sup>134</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 6. “The New Testament uses as many as thirty-three different verbs to describe what we usually cover with the single word *preaching*.” Addressed, declared, *apophtheggomai* (Acts 2:14). Proclaiming, *kataggello* (3:24; 4:2; 13:5; 13:38; 15:36; 16:17; 16:21; 17:3 [with 17:3 also has *dianoigo* and *paratithemi* which the KJV has as opening and alleging.]; 17:13; 17:23). Preached translates three different words in the ESV: *laleo* (10x), (Acts 8:25; 9:27, 29; (Spoke); 11:19; 11:20; 13:42; 14:25; 16:6; 17:19); *euaggelizo* (14x), (Acts 5:42; 8:4, 12, 35, 40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32 (Declare unto you good news [KJV] we bring you good news [ESV]); 14:7, 15, 21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18); *kerusso* (7x) (Acts 8:5; 9:20; 10:37, 42; 15:21; 9:31; 20:25; 28:31). Testifying, *diamarturomai* (7x), (Acts 2:40; 8:25; 18:5; 20:21, 24; 23:11). Teach/Teaching/Doctrine, teaching, (11x) *didache*, *didasko*, (Acts 2:42; 4:2; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 11:26; 15:1; 17:19, 18:11; 18:25; 20:21; 21:28;). Exhorted *parakaleo*, (3x) (Acts 2:40; 11:23; 15:32). Declaring, *anaggello*, (Acts 5:25; 20:20; 20:27), *laleo*, (Acts 2:11 [telling ESV, Speaking KJV]; 11:14).

speeches/sermons require a variegated vocabulary to show the richness and variety of preaching in the young church.

Much has been written on these words themselves, since C.H. Dodd delineated the differences between *kerygma* and *didaskein*.<sup>135</sup> While Dodd's views are not generally accepted today it is important for the preacher to remember that any sharp bifurcation between proclamation and teaching will affect his preaching. If these two terms are made exclusive of one another, how those within the local church setting who are not among the consciously or evidently redeemed are to hear the good news? And why would the redeemed not need to or want to hear the good news contained in the Gospel again and again? The preacher as herald tells and retells the story of God's work in Christ on man's behalf, because we need to hear it over and over again. We need to remember that every other attempt to live our lives without the fullness of the Good News is bad news.

Those who take Dodd's two-fold division of the message to its logical conclusion will fall short of bringing the life-giving, rejuvenating, hope-giving, and sustaining truth to people who need to hear it every week, in every church, not only in a missionary setting in a non-Christian world. If our teaching to the redeemed is limited only to the *didaskein*, we run the very real risk of falling into moralistic preaching that helps no one.<sup>136</sup> "Preachers sometimes need to be reminded that

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<sup>135</sup> It was Dodd's theory that the preaching and teaching that are passed down to us through the New Testament are demarcated by their setting. He identified preaching done in a missionary setting as *kerygma*. This preaching is what we today would consider cross-cultural evangelism. An immediate problem with Dodd's distinction is the limitation of *kerygma* to the "proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world." Dodd quoted in Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 6. The other category of proclamation in the early church, *didaskein*, is defined as moral and ethical teaching.

<sup>136</sup> For a further development of the danger of moralistic preaching see Zack Eswine, *Preaching in a Post-Everything World*, 53-54, and Brian Chappel, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 263-310. Sidney Greidanus quotes Thor Hall, *Future Shape of Preaching*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 106,

literally, by *definition*, we are in the business of preaching the ‘Good News’.”<sup>137</sup>

This Good News is for every person, fits every life situation, and addresses every culture. It is for this reason that the process of telling it, proclaiming it, testifying to it, and heralding it needs such a broad and varied vocabulary. We err when we fall into the trap of thinking that evangelism is for persons somewhere outside of the pale of Christendom (or our local church). We err when we seek to think of evangelism as a way to bolster the roster of the local church. All true biblical preaching is meant to be the announcement of the Good News.

With the rise of the concept of Christendom, the Church lost some of its vibrancy and urgency in what we now call evangelistic proclamation. In fact, Darrel Guder tells us that the term ‘evangelism’ [is] a relatively new word in the Christian vocabulary. The term’s emergence in the nineteenth century came from the new challenge coming from the rise of secularism in Christendom, burdened by the assumption that all truly civilized people had been, for centuries, already Christians. But when Western “colonists encountered vast numbers of peoples under their control who were adherents of non-Christian religions” the necessity for evangelism returned to the forefront.<sup>138</sup> In today’s missionary setting, and in every age of mission, all preaching must embody the good news or it is not Biblical Preaching.

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“The end result [of strictly ethical *didaskēin* preaching] was tragic: inside the Christian community, the function of the preacher was reduced to an exercise in Christian moralism—often torn loose from any detectable grounding in the Christian gospel itself...”

<sup>137</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 6.

<sup>138</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, (Eerdmans, 2000), 10-11. “The modern term, ‘evangelism,’ ...picks up NT language that had long been neglected in the language of Christendom. The NT activity defined as ‘evangelizing’ and ‘evangelization’ focused on the communication of the gospel so that people might respond and become followers of Jesus Christ. Evangelists are bringers of good news, and evangelization is the process by which this news is brought.... Evangelism is too often seen as the initial proclamation of the story and not as the ongoing and continual continuous proclamation of the story for and already believing.” 12-13.



## The Content of the Gospel in Acts

Assuming for the moment the validity of a specific and distinct *kerygma*, we ask, what is its content? What constitutes the Good News in the Book of Acts?

Robert Mounce gives us a short list of the common gospel (*euangelion*) or *kerygma*, found in Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-41.

- 1) An historical proclamation of the [life and ministry] death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, set forth as the fulfillment of prophecy, including man's responsibility
- 2) A theological evaluation of the person of Jesus as both Lord and Christ
- 3) A summons to believe and receive the forgiveness of sins<sup>139</sup>

Ajith Fernando identifies six features of the apostolic Gospel in Acts 5:12-42

- 1) Introduction of the sermon
- 2) The facts of Christ
- 3) A reference to Christ's death
- 4) Resurrection
- 5) Offer of salvation
- 6) Accreditation—we are witnesses, the Holy Spirit as witness<sup>140</sup>

In Peter's sermon in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10) Luke gives what is surely a summary statement the full discourse including these Gospel elements.

- 1) Jesus' life and ministry, including the anointing of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' works of power (v. 37-39)
- 2) Jesus' death by crucifixion (v. 39)
- 3) The resurrection (v. 40-41)
- 4) The message that the apostles are commanded to preach to *all* people, not Jews only. Here is the universal aspect of the Good News.

It is clear that some kind of account of the life and character of Jesus formed an integral part in all of the early church's preaching, especially in its initial

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<sup>139</sup> Robert H. Mounce, "Gospel," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 474, quoted in Fernando, *Acts*, 101.

<sup>140</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 212-213.

evangelism.<sup>141</sup> In addition to the facts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, there is also warning of judgment and a call to repentance in these early sermons. “Thus the attempt to bring conviction about sin, to warn about judgment, and to call people to repentance ought to be standard elements today, as they were in Acts.”<sup>142</sup> It is important to note here, as we will have opportunity to do again in the preaching of Paul, that in all our witness we must have in mind the goal of a response to the gospel. This is not popular in our pluralistic society. “People have accepted dialogue as a suitable way to discuss religion. But the end [goal] of such dialogue is mutual enrichment. [Biblical evangelism in] Acts...always asks for a response.”<sup>143</sup>

When Roland Allen surveys Paul’s preaching, he considers his preaching to both Jews in the synagogue and Gentiles in the market. Because there is a distinct difference between the preaching in these two settings some have suggested that Paul failed to preach a truly Gospel sermon at Lystra and Athens. Allen quotes Sir William Ramsay in his book, *St. Paul The Traveler*, “There is nothing in the reported words of St. Paul that are overtly Christian, and...nothing that several Greek philosophers might not have said.”<sup>144</sup> This is contrary to the facts given to us in the Book of Acts. All of Paul’s preaching, says Allen, is gospel preaching that contains the same basics as the primitive preaching of Peter. Indeed, there is “a closer agreement between the preaching in the synagogue and the preaching outside than is sometimes allowed.”<sup>145</sup> Allen says that the apparent differences are more a matter of

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<sup>141</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church & The World*, 190-191.

<sup>142</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 117.

<sup>143</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 212.

<sup>144</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul’s or Ours?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 66.

<sup>145</sup> Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul’s or Ours?*, 64.

Paul's great adaptability and creativity in the variety of circumstances presented to him as a missionary preacher. When we look at the sermons at Lystra and Athens in Acts 13, 14 and 17, they contain "every one of the characteristics" of his synagogue sermon in Antioch.<sup>146</sup>

Allen uses Paul's description of his preaching in I Thessalonians to give a summary of the content of the preaching that was surely his throughout the missionary encounters recorded for us in the Book of Acts.

- 1) There is one living and true God. (1:9)
- 2) Idolatry is sinful and must be forsaken (1:9)
- 3) The wrath of God is ready to be revealed against the heathen for their impurity (4:6) and against the Jews for their rejection of Christ and their opposition to the Gospel (2:15, 16)
- 4) The judgment will come suddenly and unexpectedly (5:2,3)
- 5) Jesus the Son of God given over to death (1:10)
- 6) The kingdom of Jesus is now set up and all men are invited to enter it (2:12)
- 7) Those who believe and turn to God now expect the coming of the Savior who will receive them (1:10; 4:15-17)
- 8) Meanwhile their life must be pure (4:1-8), and useful (4:11-12), and watchful (5:4-8)
- 9) To that end God has given them His Holy Spirit (4:8; 5:19)<sup>147</sup>

We see that there is a broadness in the preaching of Paul. The "content of the gospel is most important. That is something we can easily forget in our efforts to be relevant...The gospel is always good news. But for that good news to be relevant we must often present the bad news of people's sin and warn them of its consequences."<sup>148</sup> We must continually review this content because of the subtle pull

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<sup>146</sup> Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours?*, 66.

<sup>147</sup> Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours?*, 68.

<sup>148</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 143.

to cultural relevancy and man-centered methods of preaching. We dare not allow ourselves to dilute the Good News so that it becomes bad news.<sup>149</sup>

### **Attitudes toward the audience**

Preaching is difficult work. It is a battle of cosmic proportions for the souls of human beings.<sup>150</sup> Although we fight a war in preaching and must seek supernatural power in preaching through prayer, we must also remember that the people in our audience are not our enemies. They are in the thrall of the enemy, but they are still human beings whom we are seeking to reach with the Good News. Like teachers who are told, “you are not teaching your subject, you are teaching students,” we are not solely heralding the Good News; we are seeking to get the Good News into the minds *and* hearts of our hearers. In much the same way, Haddon Robinson echoes this concern when he contrasts the “amateur” speaker with the “professional” communicator. “In public speaking the amateur says words. The professional, on the other hand, possesses a deep desire to communicate. The amateur settles for getting the ideas out of his head, while the professional strives to get them into ours.”<sup>151</sup> Our attitude toward our audience is a longing to bring them into the sphere of the message as participants. God has given us pictures of the kind of person-to-person sensitivity that facilitates this encounter in the sermons of Acts.

Boyd Luter and C. Richard Wells show us how this is done by looking at each sermon in Acts through the grid of classical rhetoric.<sup>152</sup> We are not interested in all

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<sup>149</sup> Paul’s care to keep the Gospel central is heard as he defends his mission to the Gentiles as preaching the gospel and describes it as the message of salvation, the Good News of salvation (Acts 15:7).

<sup>150</sup> See Appendix 4: Preaching as Spiritual Warfare.

<sup>151</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 194.

<sup>152</sup> Wells and Luter, C. Richard Wells and A. Boyd Luter, *Inspired Preaching. A Survey of Preaching Found in the New Testament*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2002).

of the rhetorical moves of each sermon here, however. Our interest is in seeing how the apostolic preachers affirmed, respected, and drew their audience into their proclamation. For example, at Pentecost, Peter engages his audience by answering the question being asked by the audience about the languages they were hearing (2:15). He connects with two distinct factions in the crowd “men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem.”<sup>153</sup> When the Apostles are mocked as drunkards, he dignified the mockers by referring to them as brothers and countrymen. The accusation is turned with a soft answer, which allowed Peter to speak to his point. This pattern we will see in every sermon in Acts. The evangelists do not launch into a proclamation of the gospel out of the blue, but begin with something to which the audience can relate.<sup>154</sup> C. Richard Wells says that Peter’s “character adorns the gospel with winsome credibility.”<sup>155</sup>

In Peter’s second sermon (Acts 3,4), this winsomeness is seen when Peter brushes aside the crowd’s attempt to honor him as the source of healing. In what Wells call a “classic encounter of Christ and culture,” Peter connects with his audience as one of them, joining them in amazement at God’s power and glory in healing this lame man.<sup>156</sup> Peter shows the audience that he has answers for their questions regarding this miracle. Peter continues to draw his audience in with a “heavy use of Jewish terms for God and for Christ...references to their national

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<sup>153</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 92.

<sup>154</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 108.

<sup>155</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 90.

<sup>156</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 95-96. C. Richard Wells leans heavily on John Chrysostom in this chapter who said, “...nothing is so advantageous and so likely to pacify the hearers as to say nothing about one’s self of an honorable nature, but on the contrary, to obviate all surmise of wishing to do so.”

hopes and aspirations...the appeal to their [common] Scriptures...to identify with the audience...”<sup>157</sup>

Entering the house of Cornelius he is aware of the uncertainty that everyone surely felt about how Jew and Gentile would get along. He identifies himself with that uncertainty saying, “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (10:34, 35) Wells says that Peter’s connection with his audience is one of feeling his theology with them. He is saying, “A new day has come, *we* are experiencing it *together!*” By confessing that he is learning something new with them, he draws them into what he has come to herald.<sup>158</sup>

When we come to Stephen in Acts 7, we see a “new kind of preacher,” one who is “ahead of his time” in boldness and aggressiveness.<sup>159</sup> But even so he begins his sermon/defense with a respectful address to his “negative, truncated, proof-texting, culture-bound” accusers. He does this by refusing to answer their charges until he tells the story of God’s glorious work among them as the people of God. “Like Peter at Pentecost, Stephen created a theo-centric horizon. He shifted attention away from the human to the divine—in this case, from the glory of the *house* of God to the glory of the *God* of the house.”<sup>160</sup>

Paul shows the same concern as Peter and Stephen by identifying with his audiences.<sup>161</sup> In Acts 13, Paul is preaching to Hellenized Jews at their invitation. Even though scholars have identified a number of details and emphases from

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<sup>157</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 142-143.

<sup>158</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 100.

<sup>159</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 110.

<sup>160</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 109.

<sup>161</sup> Acts 13, 17, 21, 22.

classical rhetoric, it does not appear as though Paul is seeking to impress the members of the Pisidian synagogue with his rhetoric. What stands out is Paul's use of both his "cosmopolitan education" and his theological expertise to "communicate the gospel as effectively as possible."<sup>162</sup> Paul is not a peddler of religious ideas put in service to rhetorical flourish or sold to the highest bidder for the entertainment of the crowd, like so many professional communicators in his day. He is driven by something far greater, the eternal destiny of his hearers. This is not a contest that ends in the failure or success of human persuasion and manipulation. "Paul sought to liberate people with so great love as if he were himself in that evil from which he wished to make them whole."<sup>163</sup>

Again Paul shows his ability to connect with an audience in his sermon before the council of the Aeropagus in Acts 17. He speaks cultured Greek, refers to a Greek poet, compliments his audience for being religious, and builds his remarks on their inscription to the unknown god.<sup>164</sup> Even as Stephen had been, he is rudely treated by the Athenians and called a "babbler," or, literally a seed-picker, a rag-picker. Yet he responds as Peter did in Acts 3, softly, even referring to the Athenians as "God's offspring (17:29). He addresses them according to their own Stoic and Epicurean worldviews as he brings them the Good News."<sup>165</sup> All of this shows Paul's desire to connect with his audience before he moves into the heart of the *kerygma*.

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<sup>162</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 114.

<sup>163</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, quoting Augustine.

<sup>164</sup> see Bruce Winter, "Paul's Paradigm for Preachers," 93-105, *Preach the Word, Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 99.

<sup>165</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary, Realities, Strategies and Methods*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 168.

When Paul is called upon to make his defense in Acts 21 and 22, we see him again going to great lengths to connect with his audience. Speaking to the angry crowd in Jerusalem, Paul, the Hellenized Jewish Roman citizen, speaks to them in “the Hebrew dialect” (21:40; 22:2). He is, as they are, a Jew. He has been brought up in Jerusalem. He lived strictly in accordance with the law. They are zealous for God, so is he. He reminds them that his education has been at the feet of their great theological hero, Gamaliel. The crowd hushes; Paul has gained a hearing.<sup>166</sup>

In front of Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, Paul is a model of deference neither flattering his judges nor disrespecting them. Paul, who felt at home in the Greco-Roman world of ideas, laws, and social mores, could cite poets, use logic to win an argument, and use his great learning and experience as a home-field advantage.<sup>167</sup> He does not. He humbly recognizes the dignity of his audience and tells the story of the Good News to the best of his ability.

We know that in our age, the day of the orator and the rhetorician is over. However, to avoid rhetorical elements in our preaching for the sake of appearing to be sincere, to take on a conversational tone for the sake of breaking down the audiences defenses, to use their patois and lingua franca just to fit in, is not what we see in the apostles. What we do see here, and must emulate, is the deep desire for the audience’s good. They are not the enemy, but they can be taken from the enemy’s power as we humbly, transparently, and authentically connect the Good News with their plight. Peter was not a Gentile; Philip was not an Ethiopian; Paul was neither truly a Greek nor a Roman. In each instance, these heralds attempted to cross the

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<sup>166</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 104-105.

<sup>167</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 105.



divide between themselves and their hearers by building a bridge built on respect for the audience, and then using that bridge as a platform from which to preach. In this way they reflected the love of the Savior who lived among us and told us the truth. The connection with our audience is never manipulation; it is the fruit of the Father's love flowing through us.

### **Attitude toward Scripture**

The preaching in the New Testament, in general and that of the apostles in Acts specifically, finds its foundation in the claim that God has spoken. In both Testaments there is a dynamic tension between what is being spoken *extempore* and what becomes the authoritative record of God's speech. The Apostles speak as the prophets spoke. They are divinely appointed heralds and stewards of a divinely originated message. Their message is recorded and passed down to succeeding generations as the Word of God. The preachers of the New Testament do not consider these *writings* as the words of mere men. The opening words of the letter to the Hebrews tell us that God spoke through the prophets (Hebrews 1:1-2); Peter claims that the prophets spoke as ones carried along by the Holy Spirit. He boldly asserts that he and the rest of the apostolic band did not "follow cleverly devised myths" when they preached the good news (2 Peter 2:16, 21). The preaching of Acts is solidly Biblical. It is true to and based on the entire received corpus of the Law and the Prophets, typically upon specific texts.<sup>168</sup> The conviction for the apostolic

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<sup>168</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 4, 5. "...the apostles recognize that they speak on behalf of God and, in fact, proclaim the very word of God. Just like the Old Testament prophets, Paul frequently calls his messages 'the word of God' or 'the word of the Lord.' Perhaps the clearest passage in this respect is Paul's statement to the Thessalonians: 'And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers' (1 Thess 2:13)."

preachers, like that of the prophets before them, was that the Word spoken is also God's deed, his working.<sup>169</sup> When they proclaim the Word of God, the work of God is being accomplished in the hearers. As Peter says, "you have been born again...through the living and abiding word of God...and this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:23, 25). The word spoken is a word from God, and as the word from God it is the word of God and the power of God (Romans 1:16). The New Testament, therefore, views preaching as "God in action."<sup>170</sup> Greidanus marks a distinct difference between the proclamation of the prophets in the Old Testament and the preaching of the Apostles in the New. The prophets found their source of preaching through "vision, dream, or audition."<sup>171</sup> The apostles preach from what they have seen and heard in Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. "As such, their preaching moved toward exposition of Scriptures."<sup>172</sup>

Peter placed himself in the role of a servant to the word at the very outset of his first recorded sermon on the Day of Pentecost, when he begins to explain the fiery phenomena, "This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel..." (Acts 2:16). As he has already shown in 1:20, Peter is eager to make Scripture both the guide for the future and the interpreter of the past. With this short introduction, Peter establishes this day as a day connected with the prophetic Word of God. While some will look first at the content of this message for the apostle's understanding of the Gospel, or the *kerygma*, what is important is that Peter is speaking as one with a conviction of the trustworthiness, unity, and inspiration of Scripture. Derek Thomas

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<sup>169</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 5.

<sup>170</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblioteca Sacra*, 131 (1974), 56, quoted in Greidanus, *Preacher and Ancient Test*, 5.

<sup>171</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 5.

<sup>172</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 5.

comments here that “Peter...provides us with a model of what preaching is: exposition of God’s written word with a view to applying it to the present and preparing us for the future.”<sup>173</sup> We have here a true “biblical sermon, which means that it is centered on the Bible. Peter did not have the New Testament before him when he preached at Pentecost, but he had the Old Testament. And not only did he have it, he knew it.”<sup>174</sup> Thomas suggests that Peter had been poring over relevant texts relating to the Messiah between the Ascension and Pentecost, pursuing the track that Jesus started him and the rest of the disciples on after the resurrection.<sup>175</sup> Peter makes no apology for what he says and seeks only to connect the now with the past, saying, “this is that.” Indeed these are “words of tremendous import”<sup>176</sup> showing preachers what the basis for every sermon must be.<sup>177</sup>

It is helpful to offer a broad understanding of what is meant by the term Biblical sermon. It is only then that we will be able to focus on what many insist is the only true Biblical preaching, the expository sermon. Sidney Greidanus uses this chart to show how he defines Biblical and non-Biblical sermons.

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<sup>173</sup> Derek Thomas, *Acts*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011), 44. Thomas, an exponent of Expository preaching says here, “Such preaching has the blessing of God upon it.”

<sup>174</sup> Boice, *Acts*, 49-50.

<sup>175</sup> Thomas, *Acts*, 44.

<sup>176</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Acts*, 67.

<sup>177</sup> We should quickly add that the rest of the sermon shows with its two additional cited texts (Ps 16:8-11, Ps 110:1) that every sermon needs to be fully based in the Scriptures.

CATEGORIES	TYPES OF SERMONS			
Biblical Content	Biblical Sermon			Non-biblical Sermon
Use of text	Textual or Expository Sermon		Topical-Biblical Sermon	Topical Sermon
Length of text	Textual Unit	Verse or Clause	Nontextual	Nontextual

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Figure 1: Types of Sermons

A Biblical sermon is one that is based upon either a specific Biblical text or is fully consistent with Biblical content. The Biblical sermon may, therefore, be topical as well as textual. It cannot, however, be merely ethical or moral. A Biblical sermon is not a discourse on current events or the audience's felt needs.<sup>179</sup> Although Greidanus allows for topical preaching under the rubric of Biblical preaching and says, "it is theoretically possible to preach a Biblical sermon without a specific text," he immediately says, "there are good reasons for insisting on a preaching-text."<sup>180</sup> Knowing that the sermon is textually based gives honor to and exalts the Word of God, gives credibility and authority to the preacher, and honors the eternal needs of the listener. Richard Lischer does not overstate the importance of Biblical preaching when he claims, "people listen to preaching only when they are convinced that it is the Word of God."<sup>181</sup> Haddon Robinson challenges us to remember that since listeners' souls depend on the preacher's stewardship of the Word, it is his

<sup>178</sup> Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 12.

<sup>179</sup> Later in this same work Greidanus quotes Leander Keck, *Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978), who says that all too often a text serves only as a pretext and "serves as a catalyst; the actual content of the sermon is derived elsewhere and frequently could have been suggested just as well by a fortune cookie." 101.

<sup>180</sup> Greidanus, *Modern Preacher*, 123-124 Greidanus lists three reasons: 1) A biblical text gives authority to the sermon, 2) a text offers a framework and guideline for the preacher, 3) Allows the congregation a touchstone for judging the truthfulness of what is being proclaimed (or claimed!)

<sup>181</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001, previously published by Labyrinth Press, 1992), 48.

responsibility to show them that what they are hearing actually comes from the Bible.<sup>182</sup>

When we encounter Peter in Acts 3, following the healing of the man lame from birth and though Peter does not cite a specific text, he calls upon the audience's understanding of the entirety of the Scriptures. This sermon may stretch our definition of a Biblical expository sermon, but it is, as James Boice says, "inevitably Biblical."<sup>183</sup> He says this because even though it is not based on a particular text (although he quotes from Deuteronomy and Genesis at the end of the sermon), what makes it a Biblical sermon is Peter's word choice. When he calls Jesus the servant of God (3:13) he uses the same word that is used in the Septuagint version of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. When Peter calls Jesus the Holy and Righteous One, he again uses a title for the Messiah that is used in Isaiah.<sup>184</sup> In 3:18 when Peter tells his audience that what they have seen and are seeing is "what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets," he is again basing what he says on the whole of Scripture. He is accomplishing all three benefits of the textual sermon:<sup>185</sup> exalting the Scripture, claiming authority for his message, and helping his listeners connect with truth. Admittedly Peter is exaggerating when he claims that Moses and all of the prophets spoke of "these things").<sup>186</sup> I. Howard Marshall puts this in the context of Luke's broader historical writing:

Luke is fond of the phrase *all the prophets*...but we may well ask how the references the suffering of the Messiah can be found in literally *all* the prophets.

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<sup>182</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 23.

<sup>183</sup> Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 66.

<sup>184</sup> Boice, *Acts*, 66.

<sup>185</sup> See footnote 180.

<sup>186</sup> Acts 3:21 "what God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets long ago"; 3:24 "and all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him..."; "Moses said..." Deut 18:15-19; Lev 23:29.

The phrase is doubtless to be taken hyperbolically. Since the Old Testament nowhere speaks of a *suffering* Messiah...we should think primarily of the teaching about the suffering of God's Servant (Isa. 53), and also of other passages in the prophets and the Psalms which may have been taken as typological or prophetic of the sufferings of the Messiah.... [T]his would give us material from three of the four books of the 'latter prophets' (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Book of the Twelve; omitting Ezekiel) and also from the Psalms.<sup>187</sup>

This sermon also qualifies as being Biblical in the sense that it reflects the purpose of all of Scripture with Peter's application of a Christocentric hermeneutic:

The importance of what Peter is doing *hermeneutically*...cannot be exaggerated. He was providing his Jewish listeners a key to understanding their own Scriptures.... This is what he did at the conclusion of [this] sermon when he cited Moses' prophecy of the 'prophet like me,' Samuel's prophecy of the Davidic King..., and the promise made to Abraham that through his offspring all peoples of the earth will be blessed. This abridged Old Testament theology is a summary of what the story of redemption has been from the beginning.... The whole of Biblical history, the history of redemption, is structured prophetically in the sense that it points forward to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.<sup>188</sup>

Peter is showing us that we need to read the Bible in the same way that we would any book: "treating it as a coherent unit, looking for the plot line."<sup>189</sup> In the case of the Bible the plotline coheres around Christ and his redemptive work.<sup>190</sup>

The next sermon given to us by Luke is Stephen's defense. Again we find a sermon that is different than the one preached by Peter at Pentecost. There, a passage is quoted, explained, and followed by two more passages and explanations. Here "Stephen's address is different. It is not that he is not Biblical... he is entirely Biblical, since is he retelling the Old Testament..."<sup>191</sup> but it is only at the end that he brings specific texts (Amos 5:25-27 and Isaiah 6:1-2). Although unlike Peter's two

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<sup>187</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 92-93.

<sup>188</sup> Derek Thomas, *Acts*, 80-81.

<sup>189</sup> Thomas, *Acts* 82.

<sup>190</sup> While not a sermon, the prayer in Acts 4:25ff is based on Scripture. Preachers can continue to teach the importance of Scripture by using its language and allusions in their prayers. See Matthew Henry, *A Method of Prayer*, (Hagerstown, MD: Christian Heritage, 1994), for an excellent guide to using the language of Scripture in prayer.

<sup>191</sup> Boice, *Acts*, 120.

earlier sermons, which were both explicitly and implicitly Biblical this one is more implicit, as it retells the story of Israel without quoting specific texts. Stephen does not include all of the components of the *kerygma*, only referring to the resurrection of Jesus at the end of the speech/sermon. Stephen presages an inductive approach as we will see later in Paul, but is cut short by the murderous anger of his audience before he can complete the call to faith in the redeemer.<sup>192</sup> “Stephen’s speech.... is unique among the samples of Christian preaching reported by Luke.” It is the longest sermon and contains only one veiled mention of Jesus. There is no reference to messianic prophecy. The retelling of Israel’s rebellious past and present does not lead to a call to repentance and a promise of forgiveness, but a “pronouncement of condemnation.”<sup>193</sup> F.F. Bruce says,

It takes the form of a historical retrospective—a form well established in Jewish literature. It is a recital of divine intervention in the life of Israel. For the Rabbis, this form was used as a basis for optimism in God’s goodness. See for example Psalms 78 and 107. Stephen’s speech differs in the hard charge of blasphemy at the conclusion.<sup>194</sup>

The broad sweep of Biblical history is presented inductively with the “aha” at the end of the sermon.<sup>195</sup> We need to be careful here not to fall into a trap or a habit of merely telling the story of the Scripture without reading it to our audiences. Instead we need show them where the specific words and grammar are found. John Piper passionately calls preachers to use the Word of God in preaching:

The Word! There’s the focus. All Christian preaching should be the exposition and application of Biblical texts. Our authority as preachers sent by God rises and

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<sup>192</sup> Boice, 120-121.

<sup>193</sup> Johnson, *The Message of Acts*, 92.

<sup>194</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 144-145.

<sup>195</sup> See Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot, The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), uses “aha” as the culmination point in his sermon methodology.

falls with our manifest allegiance to the text of Scripture. I say ‘manifest’ because there are so many preachers who say they are doing exposition when they do not ground their assertions explicitly—‘manifestly’—in the text. They don’t show their people clearly that the assertions of their preaching are coming from specific, readable words of Scripture that the people can see for themselves.<sup>196</sup>

[I]n the literate Western culture we need to get people to open their Bibles and put their fingers on the text.... We are simply pulling rank on people when we tell them and don’t show them from the text. This does not honor the Word of God or the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>197</sup>

It is more than probable that the apostles did not preach holding a copy of the written text. When speaking to a Jewish audience the Apostles would have been speaking to those who had memorized large portions of the Scriptures. When speaking to pagan Gentiles, the Scriptures would have had no inherent or commanding authority. Piper’s point, however, is relevant when speaking into a word and print driven culture such as the one produced by modernity. This additionally relevant as our word and print driven culture gives way to the image based culture of postmodernity. We have been given a written word in our day just as the Apostles were in their day.

Stott commends Stephen’s use of Scripture in saying that he is showing a high respect for the Word of God. He was not blasphemous because he disrespected the Word of God he was actually honoring it. “For the Old Testament Scripture itself confirmed his teaching about the temple and the law, especially by predicting the Messiah, whereas by rejecting him it was they who disregarded the law, not he.

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<sup>196</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 41.

<sup>197</sup> Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 41-42.



Stephen's mind had evidently soaked up the Old Testament, for his speech is like a patchwork of allusions to it."<sup>198</sup>

Following Stephen's martyrdom we are given three additional looks at the preaching of the early church in Acts 8. We see the witness of the rank and file Christian dispersed by the persecution naturally overflowing in the mass evangelism of the Samaritans by Philip, and the one-on-one encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian. In the first instance our English translation tells us, "those who were scattered went about preaching the Word" (8:4). Until this point we have encountered the word translated "preaching" only in 5:42. Rather than using preaching or proclaiming as a herald as in the sermons we have considered, *euaggelizo* is used here. This word is more accurately translated as "goodnewsed." It is from this word that we get our English words evangelize and evangelism, which we have seen are relatively new words in our usage.<sup>199</sup>

People are bringing good news to those they encounter as they move out of Judea and begin to settle in Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. There is no indication that this "goodnewsing" is "a result of any particular Spirit leading as [was] the earlier preaching in Acts."<sup>200</sup> This distinction is made since our emphasis on preaching requires that we define *euaggelion* properly in our discussion. It seems safe to say that these "nameless amateur missionaries,"<sup>201</sup> escaping the persecution in Jerusalem, declared the same Biblically based *kerygma* they had heard and believed there. Although not ordained or commissioned, as were the Apostles, "these people

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<sup>198</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church, & The World*, 130.

<sup>199</sup> see footnote 138.

<sup>200</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 154.

<sup>201</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church, & The World*, 146.

did the utmost good to the people among whom they went, by proclaiming the good news of the deliverance accomplished by Christ.”<sup>202</sup>

It is doubtful if those present in Jerusalem were able to say, ‘I can see the purpose of God in all of this. The gospel is now going to spread to the nations of the world.’ Not at all! No doubt they were bowed down with the weight of their suffering, nursing their wounds, and praying for their loved ones from whom they were separated. Some would lose their lives, as Stephen had. It would only be later, as Luke recorded the story, that another pattern could be traced.<sup>203</sup>

We have to make this same assumption of Philip’s mass evangelism in Samaria since we have no record of what he said or how he framed his witness. We do know that he “proclaimed to them the Christ” (Acts 8:5). Like the wandering gospellers, he made Christ the central part of his message. Again this must have contained the basic parts of the *kerygma*, for there is no true preaching without a foundation on the Scriptures. We do know that Philip’s preaching was presented as “the Word” and “the Word of God” (8:14, 32)

The third gospel encounter has a more specific textual base in Philip’s miraculous encounter with the Ethiopian in Acts 8:32. Here Philip engages the official in conversation and then continues with the man’s question from Isaiah 53 concerning the identity of the suffering one. From there he “opens his mouth”<sup>204</sup> and tells him the good news (*euangelizo*) of Jesus. Luke gives us an account that opens the door to the conversion of the Gentiles with his signature concern for the outcast. This man “comes from the edge of the known world, of the black race, is a castrated

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<sup>202</sup> Bruce, *Acts*, 176.

<sup>203</sup> Thomas, *Acts*, 216.

<sup>204</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 164. “The phrase to ‘open one’s mouth’ is used when a significant or weighty utterance follows. Here, then is the climax of the conversation as Philip takes his point of departure from the passage and declares the good news of Jesus.”

male, and is probably a Gentile.”<sup>205</sup> It is significant to note that we have the first account of one-on-one evangelism and the first account of an individual conversion out of the more than 20,000 conversions recorded to this point in the Acts.<sup>206</sup> Marshall suggests that in spite of the fact that we do not have the exact content of Philip’s witness to the Eunuch, there is clear resemblance to another story in which “a Stranger joined two travelers and opened up the Scriptures to them, took part in a sacramental act and then disappeared.”<sup>207</sup>

We are not told what Philip said or how he developed his message, but certainly the parallelism between this encounter and the story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus suggests that Philip began with Isaiah 53 and proceeded to show how Jesus fulfilled the whole of the story of redemptive history. Since the man responds to Philip’s explanation with a request for baptism, we might also assume that the message included not only a Biblical basis of the good news but also the final component of the *kerygma*, a call to conversion. James Boice issues a challenge here that that all preaching be textually based while at the same time Christocentric. “I wonder, are you able to do that—to start with a given passage and preach Jesus?”<sup>208</sup> We will not always have such an explicitly Christ centered text from which to preach, however, Boice’s point reflects the concern that our preaching must always lead to Christ and redemption. If it does not we will preach sermons that are merely moralistic and not distinctively Christian.

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<sup>205</sup> R. C. Tennehill, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London, SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990), 108, quoted in Derek Thomas, *Acts*, 246.

<sup>206</sup> Thomas, *Acts*, 238.

<sup>207</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 161.

<sup>208</sup> Boice, *Acts*, 145.

The situations that God presented to Philip were both similar and at the same time quite different. In both of these circumstances we see Philip obediently acting in a pioneering spirit and at the same time preaching the same basic gospel message. In one case Philip is called to preach indiscriminately to persons of various social standing, gender, race and religion. In the second he “goodnewses” a single individual in a specific setting.

John Stott emphasizes that is the setting, the method, and the audience changed, but the message did not. This is a salutary reminder that there can be no evangelism without an evangel, and that Christian evangelism presupposes the good news of Jesus Christ.<sup>209</sup> Our call as Biblical preachers is to make certain that the message of the text, chosen or assigned, is clearly connected with the gospel that people must hear. “Effective evangelism becomes possible only when the church recovers both the Biblical gospel and a joyful confidence in its truth relevance and power.”<sup>210</sup>

When we come Peter’s sermon in the house of Cornelius Peter is called to present the Good News to the Gentiles.<sup>211</sup> The specifics and significance of Peter’s paradigm change. There is no explicit reference to Scripture in Peter’s sermon, but we do have a good summary of the Apostolic Gospel<sup>212</sup> that is very similar in content and emphasis to the Pentecost sermon. Jesus is presented as the promised Messiah to

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<sup>209</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church, & The World*, 163-164. See also Fernando, *Acts*, 285-285, for more on aspects of personal evangelism. We cannot allow ourselves fall prey to the really foolish suggestion that we can preach with deeds only and without words.

<sup>210</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church, & The World*, 164.

<sup>211</sup> While this is generally considered the first evangelization of the Gentiles, it seems that Philip beat Peter to the punch with the Ethiopian official in Acts 8.

<sup>212</sup> Boice, *Acts*, 182.

the God-fearing Cornelius in a “rather straightforward presentation of the *kerygma*.”<sup>213</sup> John Stott calls this “a marvelously comprehensive message, a précis of the good news according to Peter which Mark would later record more fully in his gospel, and which Luke incorporated in his.”<sup>214</sup> In addition, we notice that Peter is unhesitatingly presenting the *kerygma* as historically verifiable fact, “you know what has happened” (11:37). There is no suggestion that this message is a matter of Peter’s own interpretation or cunningly devised fables.

In Acts 13:16-41 we encounter Paul’s first recorded sermon. It may appear that Paul is not preaching either Biblically or expositively as he, like Stephen, rehearses Israel’s history from the bondage in Egypt to King David (13:22). From this historical summation he launches into the Gospel story of Jesus, ending again like Stephen, with Scripture. Even though we may be tempted to say that this is not a textual exposition, we cannot do so. Because immediately preceding Paul’s sermon, and the request for a word of exhortation from the leaders of the synagogue, there had been the customary reading of the Law and the Prophets.<sup>215</sup> His message may not fit into our clear category of an expository sermon, but it certainly fulfills the requirements for a Biblical sermon. At the same time, it shows Paul’s dependence on the Scripture as the foundation for the authority of his message. Certainly Paul is counting on his listeners’ familiarity with the Scriptures as he focuses more on the story and the application than he does building a foundation and explaining the text. Likewise today’s preachers need to be discerning, seeing the need to preach Jesus

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<sup>213</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 100.

<sup>214</sup> Stott, *Acts*, 192.

<sup>215</sup> For more about Synagogue worship see Wells and Luter, 112. Also James Boice, *Acts*, 236-237 where Boice gives four points of the sermon focusing on the *kerygma*.

Christ on the one hand and taking note of the audience on the other.<sup>216</sup> Effective preaching will “adapt one’s mode of communication to the hearer’s experience and understanding, without truncating or distorting the message.”<sup>217</sup>

Again we see the same content of the *kerygma* that Peter has set out in his preaching. Paul seems to follow Peter’s use Psalm 16 and shows that it was Jesus Christ, not David, who was raised from the dead, attributes both human and divine roles to Jesus, and then concludes with the same appeal used by Stephen.<sup>218</sup> Paul points to Jesus not as only an historical figure, but ties him to the Biblical narrative in two ways: 1) Jesus is the fulfillment of Biblical *history* and 2) he is the fulfillment of Biblical *promises*. This is why the resurrection is so prominent in this sermon. It is the historical event that verifies all that Jesus is and did. In other words, Jesus’ life and work have no meaning apart from their connection to the Scripture.<sup>219</sup> If Jesus is disconnected from either history or the historical record of Scripture, he becomes little more than an encouragement to morally or ethically improve our lives. The focus is always on what Jesus did and not on what the listeners can do.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Thomas, *Acts*, 368.

<sup>217</sup> Johnston, *The Message of Acts*, 154.

<sup>218</sup> Thomas, *Acts* 369. “...Paul was reading the historical narrative in essentially the same way as the godly Stephen, whom he had approved of killing. How astonishing is must have sounded, even to Paul himself, that he had turned 180 degrees from where he had been. From darkness he turned to light.”

<sup>219</sup> Thomas, *Acts*, reminds us that “Paul was establishing an important principle in the interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures: they pointed to and culminated in Jesus Christ.” 369.

<sup>220</sup> It is at this point that the error of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) threatens our preaching. The invitation of the Gospel is not to become part of the ethical community of God. The invitation of Apostolic preaching is to accept by faith the free fruits of the work of Christ. For a beginning point among with many current works dealing with the NPP see William B. Barclay with Ligon Duncan, *Gospel Clarity, Challenging the New Perspective on Paul*, (Carlisle, PA: EP Books USA, 2010), Cornelius P. Venema, *Getting the Gospel Right*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), Greg Gilbert, foreword by D.A. Carson, *What is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010).

In Acts 14:15-18 we find Paul<sup>221</sup> delivering what we might call an “impromptu sermon”<sup>222</sup> This is the first sermon preached to an audience that is not connected with a synagogue or familiar with Jewish beliefs. Being in the market, “they can hardly say the same things that were said in the synagogue[s]”<sup>223</sup> Nothing specifically is connected to a Biblical text. We do see their presenting Biblical truths that are foundational to understanding the whole gospel: 1) There is one God who as creator is distinguished from his creation (and from any gods in their pantheon). 2) This God has shown mercy to the ignorant throughout all the world. 3) He has a left them a witness of his goodness for the purpose that they should turn to Him (repent) from “these vain things” (idols). It is instructive to us in our preaching that even though there is no awareness by his completely pagan audience of the Biblical message, Paul begins by declaring that what he is proclaiming is “Good News.”

Here is methodology for the preacher in an Age of Mission. We start with what the audience knows by experience or holds as part of their worldview. More than this Paul makes a connection with their common experience. He, too, lives in this world that is made by God whom they cannot see and filled with things he has

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<sup>221</sup> There is no substantial difference in the pattern seen in Acts 14:1-7 when Paul and Barnabas preach to the Synagogue in Iconium from their previous work in Asia Minor. It seems safe to assume that when Luke says that they spoke effectively (v. 1) and boldly the “word of Grace (v.3) that both the method and the content of their preaching is what has already been seen. In reference to the NPP in the previous footnote, we read Derek Thomas, *Acts*, 380, “What is that message? ...It was a gospel that was essentially free from the idea of merit....The gospel requires no prior qualifications on our part. Paul and Barnabas spoke to people who had become used to thinking in terms of qualifying for the blessings of God. In recent days, this notion has been widely challenged by some. It has become popular to advocate that the Jews in this period of history were not trying to earn their way into the kingdom of God by an elaborate of good works.... Here Luke raises the word ‘grace’ to the surface to describe the essence of the gospel that the apostles preached. For Paul, grace was contrasted with works.... Luke is aware of the tendency of the unregenerate heart toward legalism: that a person can earn favor with God through personal effort. It is as prevalent today as it was in Luke’s time, and we therefore need Luke’s emphasis on *grace* as much as ever.”

<sup>222</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 115.

<sup>223</sup> Thomas, *Acts*, 384.

made that they can see. From here he builds his Biblical message that moves his audience from creation and ontology, to providence, then to the necessity for repentance. This way of building his sermon is helpful in our highly rationalistic and materialistic age. Rather than focusing on the Law that the people of Lystra have broken, Paul points them to the emptiness and vanity of the gods they are serving. There is, of course, danger in attacking the gods of any culture, as Paul's stoning here and mockery and rejection in Acts 17 show. But part of the power of the gospel is the confident and bold exposure of the impotence and empty promises of every false god and idol in every age and every culture. Paul's boldness was founded in his assurance that his audience knew the existence of a true God (Romans 1:19-23). In a world like ours today filled with teaching that says that each person is divine, or at least has a spark of divinity within them, Paul does not let his audience in Lystra think of him as a god. He turns their attention to the true God who has come down and lived among men (John 1:1-4).<sup>224</sup> His desire and method was to point them to the true God whom they were ignoring and to call them to turn to Him.

In Acts 17:21b-27 we have two brief references of preaching to the redeemed community in the first century. In the first instance, Paul and Barnabas strengthen and encourage the disciples in the cities that they had previously visited. Secondly, on their return to their home base of Antioch the two missionaries testify of God's goodness in opening the door of faith to the Gentiles.

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<sup>224</sup> Johnson, *The Message of Acts*, 193-194, for a fuller discussion on the contrasts between the Greek gods, Paul and Barnabas, and Jesus Christ.



Paul's great sermon in Acts 17:22b-31 has been studied in many places as a beginning point for preaching in a non-church culture missionary setting.<sup>225</sup> Even though it is arguable that this is not truly a sermon, it is a powerful example of making a presentation of Biblical truth before an agnostic and hostile audience. John Stott refers to this as "one of the greatest opportunities of his whole ministry, the presentation of the Gospel to the world-famous, supreme council of Athens."<sup>226</sup> For our present purposes let us consider this to be a sermon, although we immediately notice that there is no Biblical text here. The only source Paul uses for exposition is one of their Greek poets. As in the Lystra sermon in chapter 14, Paul begins with a point of common reference, the altar to the unknown god whom he identifies as the true God.<sup>227</sup> He also uses the same basic outline to present the Biblical message to his audience: (1) God is the Creator of all things (2) God is sustaining all things (3) God ordains all things (4) we should turn from our false ways and seek him. Using Biblical truth and categories, Paul adapts his message to the world-view and experience of his audience. "He has never addressed an audience whose world outlook (*Weltanschauung*) was so utterly different from his."<sup>228</sup> His attempt to bring the truth to this audience is shown both by the linguistic style he dons<sup>229</sup> and the care with which he seeks to define his terms. When Paul uses the word god, understood

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<sup>225</sup> N. B. Stonehouse, *Paul Before the Aeropagus and Other New Testament Studies*, (London: Tyndale, 1957), Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Mission, Realities, Strategies and Methods*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), F. F. Bruce, *Paul The Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) 235-247, A. T. Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, ((New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949 [first printed 1909), 157-162, Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 62-77.

<sup>226</sup> Stott, *The Spirit, The Church & The World*, 282-283.

<sup>227</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, "Even so the sermon is entirely Biblical," 480.

<sup>228</sup> Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, 160.

<sup>229</sup> Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, "there is a curious Attic flavor to the address here which every Greek student appreciates." 160.

by both himself and his intellectual listeners, he is aware and is at pains to point out that they use the word in entirely different ways. Their god is unknown, while the God of creation has surrounded them with the fingerprints, whispers, and signposts of his revelation. They claim not to know God, while agreeing with their poet who said that their whole existence is “in God.” Thirdly, their gods claim to save, but the Scripture tells us that any attempts at religion outside of the God of the Bible damn them instead.<sup>230</sup> Here is one of the first instances of contextualization. Ajith Fernando cautions us against overzealous and undiscerning attempts at contextualization by pointing out the sobering fact that Paul’s great message was in fact “misunderstood by some of his hearers.”<sup>231</sup> It takes hard work to communicate the Good News to those outside of our faith and without familiarity with the terms and concepts that the Good News entails. A. T. Robertson suggests that Paul “was at a loss to know how to cross swords with a new variety of word-mongers.”<sup>232</sup> Even so, Robertson says Paul was “faithful to Christ and the truth.... He did not preach philosophy instead of the gospel.... He will preach Christ whether the philosophers will have it or not.”<sup>233</sup> Roland Allen reminds us that while it is one thing to preach Christ with “a sympathetic knowledge of the belief of those to whom we preach and to base our appeal on the common truth we hold together with our hearers,” it is not necessary that we spend our time “philosophizing when we might be preaching Christ.” True, “philosophical disquisitions no doubt have their place,”<sup>234</sup> but the Gospel must always be foremost. Biblical-Missional preaching must preach Christ, the cross, the

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<sup>230</sup> Thomas, *Acts*, 502-507.

<sup>231</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 480.

<sup>232</sup> Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, 162.

<sup>233</sup> Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Paul*, 161.

<sup>234</sup> Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 67.

resurrection, judgment, repentance, and faith. The gospel is our supreme object and must never be obscured by our attempts to make points of contact with our audience. The rest of the speeches in Acts are more defenses than sermons, and they have their own structure and will not be considered in this section since they are not even implicitly based on Scripture.<sup>235</sup>

### **Contextualization, Metanarrative and Truth**

The preaching in the book of Acts gives us a model for the use of Scripture as a credible and trustworthy word from God to people in every time and in every place. Without setting forth an explicit doctrine of Scripture the preaching in Acts accepts and presupposes that the Scriptures are indeed the truth of God and tell the complete story of God's plan and purpose in the world. Even more than the plan and purpose of God Acts unfolds the accomplishment of that purpose and provides us a timeless and universal interpretation of it. One of the distinctives of the current philosophical climate and thinking is that there is no longer an overarching and unifying story that explains the world and life in it. Contemporary writers call this overarching story, a metanarrative. Every culture appeals to such a meaning-giving story and basis its development and practices upon it.

With the rejection of Enlightenment metanarrative<sup>236</sup> by postmoderns comes a suspicion of and rejection of all stories that claim metanarrative status.

Modernity's child, Postmodernity was defined by Jean-Francois Lyotard in 1984,

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<sup>235</sup> Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 79-80.

<sup>236</sup> David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ, Preaching in a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), calls the elements of the metanarrative "foundations" which in the Western Enlightenment story include "God, Truth, Freedom, Capitalism, The American Way, Socialism, the Proletariat, and so forth." He also quotes Jean -Francois Lyotard who says these elements of the metanarrative are so powerful in a culture that they "are regularly conferred an almost semi-divine status by the group they define..." 14.

writing “Simplifying to the extreme, I define Postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.”<sup>237</sup> There are at least two reasons that there has been this wholesale rejection of metanarratives by the current generation. First and foremost is that with the exception of Biblical story every metanarrative is false.<sup>238</sup> The man-centered story of human ability and potential for good was passed from generation to generation from the beginning years of the Enlightenment project in the West. Included in the story was the claim that progress was inevitable and at the same always good for mankind.<sup>239</sup> Such claims began to sound hollow and false as the progress of the Enlightenment collapsed under the atrocities of the twentieth century. Taking God out of the story and sidelining Him to a position of helpless spectator in the mechanistic closed system world of the Enlightenment’s creation left no ultimate purpose that can sustain our hope. Meaning and salvation was promised and sought apart from God. The dogma that said that either could be attained without God, while a compelling and human-affirming story, imploded into the vacuum left by the exile of God. David Wells has written “this promise of a salvation on humanistic terms...is now being recognized as completely fallacious.” As a result “and in the

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<sup>237</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. xxiii-iv, quoted by Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 46.

<sup>238</sup> Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed, Subverting the Empire*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004). “Postmodernity...can be described as a period of cultural disquiet. In the face of the betrayals and failures of past overarching metanarrative, culturewide suspicion and incredulity takes hold. A single story, providing coherence to personal identity, grounding for ethical action and passion for life in history, is displaced by a carnivalesque existence of fragmentation, numbness and boredom.” 25.

<sup>239</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith, A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), adds that a part of the metanarrative of inevitable progress, or myth as he refers to it, is that progress is shown by a waning belief in a God who is, or at least a God who intervenes in nature and history. 15.

ensuing despair the post-moderns are now attacking *all* ‘metanarratives,’ all beliefs in overarching meaning, all beliefs rooted in a transcendent order, all values....”<sup>240</sup>

Eastern pantheistic metanarratives are equally suspect. This is not because they lead to despair but because the inherent irrationality of Eastern religious cosmology and metaphysics. The Eastern metanarrative explodes into an irreconcilable intellectual disconnect when they meet the rational and logical consistency of the Western Enlightenment based scientific system.<sup>241</sup> Since both of these two grand stories are tried and found wanting by modern man, the conclusion is that all such stories are suspect.

The collapse of the metanarrative has removed the “structures of meaning that transcend personal preferences. In this territory, distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad, decent and indecent have not merely collapsed but become irrelevant.”<sup>242</sup>

The second reason for this loss of confidence is that metanarratives have been used as structures to undergird injustice, persecution, and oppression. Smaller, localized narratives are preferred in order to give voice to marginalized peoples. In attempt to recognize these variegated voices every story now has authority and no story trumps the others with a higher authority or validity. This democratization of

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<sup>240</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994) 47. Readers familiar with Francis A. Schaeffer will recognize similarity between Wells at this point and Schaeffer’s downward progress of the “line of despair” outlined in Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968) and *Escape from Reason*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968).

<sup>241</sup> Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book that Made Your World, How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011) 77-91, 161-247.

<sup>242</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 48. Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, agree writing, “...if all narratives—especially overarching and civilization-directing metanarratives—are met with postmodern incredulity, then it is not surprising that postmodern culture appears to have no fixed ethical anchors and is characterized by profound moral instability.” 23.

narratives diminishes every story and is the seedbed of pluralism. This is the same plurality that faced the first gospel missionaries in the world of the Roman Empire. To keep subjected peoples happy Rome allowed the local religious story to prevail and hold equal status with all stories in the vast arena of religious and philosophical options. The Biblical story shone more brightly and spoke more truly than the competing narratives and allowed the gospel to expand while other religions remained local.

A third reason that metanarratives have lost their compelling power is the extreme doubt connected to both truth as a concept and its knowability in our postmodern context. Since, it is claimed, there is no assurance of our being able to fully know truth, then we are equally unsure about the truthfulness of any given metanarrative. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, postmodern doubt has made the Christian critique of modernity easier, but on the other hand the virulent attack of postmoderns upon Enlightenment meaning, and therefore, on *all* meaning has made the Christian faith less plausible in the modern world.”<sup>243</sup>

The preaching in the Book of Acts appeals to the Divine metanarrative, the whole story of God’s work among His people for the peoples of the world.<sup>244</sup> Merold Westphal says that calling the Christian story a metanarrative is a misunderstanding of Lyotard’s work. A metanarrative is a story, which seeks to legitimize a culture of society. Christianity needs no such legitimization. It stands on its own.<sup>245</sup> Westphal

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<sup>243</sup> Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, 23.

<sup>244</sup> This is the emphasis of Guder in *Continuing Conversion*.

<sup>245</sup> Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, 29. “Faith is invariably rooted in overarching stories or metanarratives that give meaning and direction to life.... Such stories always entail certain foundational beliefs or assumptions. These assumptions and these kinds of stories are usually argued *from*, not argued *to*. They are the basis of any argument and are not, in the end, finally provable. That, is, they require faith.” We should say the *for the Christian*, Christianity stands on its own.

says we need to see the Christian Story as a “mega narrative” since it is not merely overarching or undergirding, but all-embracing.<sup>246</sup> Metanarratives are time and place specific and bound to a particular culture. The meganarrative of the Bible is universal, transcending time and place.

The story is told in the same way every time it is presented in Acts. Jewish audiences get the whole story that depends on their history and Scripture. Gentiles receive a truncated version that fits with their cultural preconceptions and presuppositions. For both groups the story defines both the past (Jews as God’s people, Gentiles as outsiders) and the present/Future (both made into one new people). Notice this in Acts 10: 46 when the Gentiles receive the good news as true, that the Holy Spirit comes into the place with tongues as on Pentecost to show “a type of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile, whose alienation had for ages been secured and symbolized by differences in language.”<sup>247</sup> They are now one people included in one same story, the meganarrative, we are to preach today.

This inherent power of the narrative, especially in preaching, is that it is Truth.<sup>248</sup> It is a true story, declaring and embodying Truth and unless it is declared as truth it has no compelling power on the preacher or the audience. This truth is both divinely given and historically verifiable. In Acts 10 Peter preaches as though there is

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<sup>246</sup> Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology, Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), xiii-xiv quoted in Michael Horton, *Christian Faith*, 16.

<sup>247</sup> Alexander, *Acts*. 49.

<sup>248</sup> For Evangelical responses to contemporary doubt regarding truth see D.A. Carson, ed. *Telling the Truth, Evangelizing Postmoderns*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences, The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism*, (Downers Grove, IVP, 2001), Andreas Kostenberger, general editor, *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be, Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995), Alistair McGrath, *A Passion for Truth, The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, 1996, R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian, The Emergence of Postmodernism in the Church*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005).

a common acceptance of the details of Jesus' life and ministry. His Gentile listeners were at least vaguely familiar with what had been going on in Judea.<sup>249</sup> They could have countered him if what he was saying about Jesus was not true. He does not say, "This is true" but declares it as though it is true, without apology or explanation. Without a true story we have no good news,<sup>250</sup> we have nothing distinctive or unique, we have nothing to say in the face of a hundred other narratives each trying to counter culture doubt and despair. John Calvin reminds us that another way of declaring the truth is refuting lies. We unburden the gospel [truth] by putting away the lies that have been placed on it. "We need not wonder that what we 'teach godly, well, and profitable' should be so 'falsely misconstrued,' for 'the doctrine of the gospel can never be handled so warily and moderately, but that it shall be subject to false accusations.' For that very reason, when we see the gospel 'corrupted, deformed, and torn in pieces with false reports, we must not repent that we have begun.' Rather 'it is our part and duty to dash and put away those lies wherewith the truth of God is burdened.'"<sup>251</sup>

At some times Biblical-Missional preaching may have to use apologetic methodology and argumentation. However, in many cases the proof of truth will not be as important as showing why this truth is significant. Peter connects Jesus with Davidic prophecy, Stephen connects with the Covenantal failure of the Jews, Peter declares that the nation-embracing goal of the Covenant is being realized in the home of Cornelius, and Paul shows how the truth answers the aspirations of a people who

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<sup>249</sup> Marshall, *Acts*, 192.

<sup>250</sup> This point is made by internet blogger Steve Walton, "The Theologian", <http://www.theologian.org.uk/pastoralia/postmodernism.html>, (accessed August, 28, 2011).

<sup>251</sup> Quoted in Wells and Luter, *Inspired Preaching*, 109.



doubt the existence of truth while they were covering their religious bases by erecting an altar to “the unknown god.”<sup>252</sup>

### **Boldness and Confidence in preaching**

The distinctive feature of preaching in the book of Acts, is an astonishing confidence.<sup>253</sup> When Peter and John were asked by the Sanhedrin, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” their bold answer astonished their haughty interrogators. The authoritative teaching and powerful signs in the ministry of their teacher, Jesus, was met with this same kind of astonishment. The change in these men is still astonishing to us nearly twenty centuries later. In the midst of the howling wind and pyrotechnics of flaming tongues, Peter stands in front of an incredulous crowd of mockers and declares with authority, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words” (Acts 2:14). In the next sentence he unhesitatingly states, “This is that” (2:16). There is no hedging, caution, or self-effacing doubt. When faced with the man crippled from birth, (3:6) he commands him to stand up, showing perhaps a greater confidence in the power commissioned to him than even in his preaching. He who could not face a servant girl in the fire’s glow confidently asserts to both Ananais and Sapphira that they have lied to the Holy Spirit and pronounces their death sentences (5:1-11). Peter

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<sup>252</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *Reformation: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-sire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000, Reprinted 2011), 80-81. “What is needed above all at the present time, then, is a ministry which handles the Word of God with respect and which impresses on the congregation not just the fact that God’s word is true and powerful, but why it is so and what the significance of this is. The only way that one can consistently do this, I believe, is through systematic expository preaching, which impresses upon the congregations the fact that the Bible ultimately tells one story, that of humanity’s fall and redemption, and contains one history, that of God’s dealings with men and women, culminating in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

<sup>253</sup> My contention is that this confidence is a natural outgrowth of the Apostles’ conviction that their message is both based on and in the Word of God and also comes forth as the Word of God.

and John confidently stand firm before the preaching prohibition of the council and announce, “We must serve God rather than man!” (5:19)

Richard Lischer says there is a powerful ambivalence in every public speaker which must be overcome before any act of speech. There is a conflict between the desire to hoard words and the desire to release them. While this conflict may not be present in most conversational speech, it is certainly felt by those called upon to speak publically. This ambivalence is more pronounced and is burdened with heavier consequence when the words are the Word of God. He says,

A speech event means that the ambivalence has been temporarily solved and that the speaker is willing to engage in some measure of self-revelation. In preaching, the speaker’s stakes are even higher, for the words convey the ultimate realities toward which the speaker may not remain disinterested. Already standing to speak in the assembly he or she has evinced courage, passion, and conviction.<sup>254</sup>

How is this ambivalence overcome? Ambivalence may be far too weak a word to describe what goes on in the mind of the preacher. The public speaker is faced with multiple risks. There is the risk that the message will be rejected—and with it the God who has given the message. There is the risk that the audience will reject the preacher (Luke 10:16). Above all, there is the risk that the speaker will misspeak and misrepresent the God of the message and be rejected on a much larger scale. Peter, who had just weeks before dishonored himself and disappointed the master’s three year investment in him by three strong denials, now stands before a multitude of thousands. Where has the ambivalence gone? Where is the fear of man, which snared him and brought forth the curse-laced disavowals of his Lord? If

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<sup>254</sup> Lischer, *Theology of Preaching*, 61.

Lischer is correct, Peter's desire to tell the Good News has outweighed his desire to play it safe at Pentecost.

More importantly, Peter has confidence in the One who sent him and in the trustworthiness of the Word he is to speak. The preacher will know great confidence when the content of the message is believed to be the Word of and the words of God. The preacher will have confidence when the apostolic commission is taken seriously. No preacher needs to fear man when speaking the Word of God on behalf of God in obedience to God. It is true that the audience may, mock, decry, argue with, and even reject the ambassador. But that is a far smaller threat than being denied by Christ before the Father as a wicked servant who has hidden the message away (Luke 9:26).

The starting place for dispelling fear in preaching is confidence in the message. The confidence seen in the apostles as they proclaim the Good News, witness to the resurrection, and preach repentance in Acts is almost exclusively described as boldness. It is a fearlessness and courage that is needed by us today. There are two problems that face us when we consider the idea of boldness. The first is who we are as human instruments. How is it that we as mere humans can claim to speak the words of God? The second is that we may have an insufficient definition of the apostolic boldness. As we shall see below, if our understanding of boldness is limited to bravery or the willingness to take risks we, will miss much of what is being said in relation to apostolic preaching. Overcoming these two hurdles in our understanding of boldness is the next step in exploring Biblical/Missional Preaching

The first problem concerns the limitations of our humanity. We are not prophets who can say, “Thus says the Lord,” nor would we dare to say, as Jesus did, “Verily, Verily I say unto you.”<sup>255</sup> In a culture that lionizes its own commitment to pluralism and tolerance, we are only one more voice in a cacophony of pundits, mavens, and hotshots. If we seek to speak authoritatively by appealing to sources outside of ourselves, we easily risk diluting and weakening the authority of our preaching.<sup>256</sup> How can we find or have the boldness and confidence that was the apostles’, without claiming immediate inspiration? Can we bring a true apostolic boldness to our preaching? Can the preacher today speak in the imperative as the Apostles did?<sup>257</sup>

The Apostles are presented to us in Acts as radically changed men. We have already attributed this change to a two-step phenomenon of the baptism and filling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>258</sup> This in the apostles in Acts is described as “boldness” more than any other term. This boldness is seen in contrast to the fear that the apostles displayed in the events surrounding the crucifixion, and arguably even until Pentecost, when we discover them still behind closed doors. “What began in fear emerged in boldness.”<sup>259</sup> Biblical-Missional Preaching will evidence this same boldness as one fruit of the Holy Spirit in us. The kind of preaching we want to

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<sup>255</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 29.

<sup>256</sup> H. H. Farmer, *The Servant of the Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964, [reprint of 1942 edition, New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1942]), 42. Farmer strongly suggests the limitation of quotations, particularly literary, for this reason as well as for the reason that it sets an unnecessary barrier between the preacher and the audience. William Perkins warns against the use of “specialized vocabulary of the arts...Greek and Latin Phrases, [and] odd turns of phrase...in the sermon” Saying that “they also tend to draw [the listeners’ minds away from the subject at hand to other things In this connection, too, mere story telling as well as vulgar or foolish story statements must be avoided.” *Art of Prophecy*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996 [First English edition 1605]), 72.

<sup>257</sup> Boldly Paul says, “Let it be known!” (Acts 13:38) and “God commands men everywhere to repent.” (17:30).

<sup>258</sup> See Appendix 3 Spiritual Warfare.

<sup>259</sup> Derek Thomas, *Acts*, 3.

evince in our own lives is one of assurance, courage, and fearlessness. It must, however, be both a holy boldness and a humble boldness. It will be this if it streams out of a life overflowing with the unction of the Holy Spirit.

When we come to the second problem of defining boldness, we find that two closely related words are used in Acts to categorize the Post-Pentecost boldness of the apostles: *parresia* and *parresiazomai*. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines these words as:

- 1) *parresia* (Acts 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 28:31)
  - a) freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech
    - i) openly, frankly, *i.e.* without concealment
    - ii) without ambiguity or circumlocution
    - iii) without the use of figures or comparisons
  - b) free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance
  - c) the deportment by which one becomes conspicuous or secures publicity
- 2) *parresiazomai* (Acts 9:27, 29; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26)
  - a) To use freedom in speaking
    - i) to speak freely
  - b) To grow confident, to have boldness, show assurance, assume a bold bearing<sup>260</sup>

There is a broader range of meaning in these words than in our common English usage. We find there is another way of looking at boldness than we are used to seeing. From the definition of these two Greek terms, we learn that boldness in preaching is not merely a fearless proclamation. It is plain speaking. It is possible for one to be bold and ambiguous. One can be fearless and still lie. One can be courageous and still speak in riddles and clichés. This is not the boldness that we see in the apostles. Their boldness was courage that was connected to and committed to

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<sup>260</sup> [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) (accessed March 25, 2011).

clarity.<sup>261</sup> Their boldness is seen in the fact that they spoke clearly and plainly the whole counsel of God, not mincing hard words, not hiding the disagreeable, not leaving the difficult for a later time.<sup>262</sup> The whole truth is told without fear of offending the audience with that truth. Not telling the whole truth, not speaking clearly and plainly, is to speak without apostolic boldness and lays us open to grave consequences as Archibald Alexander's told his student preachers

we are exposed to a strong temptation to conceal or disguise the unpalatable truths of the Gospel, that we may gain [the] favor of [man], or avoid giving them offence." The preacher who gives into this fear "will contract a deep stain of guilt, and will be chargeable with the murder of immortal souls" if this fear keeps the gospel from being clearly proclaimed.<sup>263</sup>

When Peter preached at Pentecost, he told his audience about Jesus whom, "you crucified and killed." Days later preaching on the steps of the temple following the healing of the lame man he says, "But *you* denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to *you*, and killed the Author of life..." (3:14, 15). In their first trial before the Council, Peter declares "...Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom *you* crucified" (4:10). At the second trial, Peter responds to the mandate to stop preaching of the resurrection of Jesus by boldly asserting, "We must

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<sup>261</sup> David Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 77, quotes James Denney who said that the three great rule for preaching are "Lucidity, Lucidity, Lucidity." R. L. Dabney insisted that his students understood and strove for clarity of speech. He wrote, "To secure perspicuity the first requisite is clearness of thought. Next, let home-bred, vernacular words be preferred, and all unnecessary technicalities be avoided. Let words be employed uniformly and exactly in their recognized meanings. This canon of perspicuity is violated often from carelessness of thought and indistinctness of conception, as well as from ignorance of the exact shades of sense affixed by classic usage." R. L. Dabney *Evangelical Eloquence, A Course of Lectures on Preaching*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999, first published as *R. L. Dabney on Preaching*, 1979 as a reprint of R. L. Dabney, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 1870), 272-273.

<sup>262</sup> Stott, *Preacher's Portrait*, "Are we then to modify our message simply because it offends? I have read that the seventeenth century Jesuit missionaries in China did. They were anxious not to offend the refined taste of the Chinese literati. So they redrafted the gospel story omitting everything to which exception might be taken, and especially the crucifixion. It is not surprising that what was left... was 'unobjectionable residue,' had no divine power in it to win lasting converts." 113.

<sup>263</sup> James Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 168.

obey God rather men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom *you* killed” (5:30, 31 Italics added for emphasis). Philip boldly goes into the region of the despised Samaritans (8:4-8). There is great boldness in Peter’s response to Simon Magus (8:20). Peter boldly obeys God and he goes to the house of Cornelius even though everything in his religious and cultural screamed at him to the contrary. Perhaps Peter’s greatest moment of this plain-speaking boldness comes not when he goes to the house of Cornelius, but when he defends himself before the assembled disciples in Jerusalem. He who showed great squeamishness in going to the Gentiles now defends his going by proclaiming, “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (11:16-17). He continues to stand boldly for God’s work when the Jerusalem council debated how to include the Gentiles into the young church: “Now why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (15:10).

It is not only Peter who shows this boldness and plain speaking. Stephen tells the whole of God’s graciousness to his people the Jews and their checkered response to Him through the years. He is interrupted mid-sermon when he calls his listeners “stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears” who “always resist the Holy Spirit.” And like the fathers who killed the prophets of old, they now have “betrayed and murdered” the Righteous One, Jesus (7:51-53).

It is this same boldness that is heard in Paul when he leaves the resistant Jews for the Gentiles saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you have thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles”(13:46). We see it again when he calls the Athenians to repentance (Acts 17:30). For three months Paul “spoke boldly, reasoning, and persuading” a “stubborn” synagogue congregation who “continued in unbelief “ and spoke “evil of the Way” (19:8,9). When the great riot later breaks out in Ephesus, Paul boldly wanted to go and talk to the crowd (19:30). It is with boldness that Paul makes his testimony before the temple mob (21:37-22:21), the Sanhedrin (23:1-6),<sup>264</sup> Felix (24:10-21), Festus (25:1-12), and Agrippa (26: 2-29). The last scene that Luke gives us in Acts shows Paul “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance”(28:31).

Boldness in Acts is the plain, clear, and confident speaking of the message given to the herald by the King. Plain and clear speaking is not only contrasted with ambivalence and opacity in speech. It is also contrasted to wittiness and human wisdom, as Paul makes clear to the Corinthians when he writes to them (1:20-25). Certainly it was not a mindless serendipity that led the Puritans to develop a better way of preaching which they called the “Plain-Style.” It is a plain-speaking boldness that is contrary to man-pleasing and ear-tickling.

This boldness is not arrogance or brashness. It is an assurance and confidence that proceeds with humility. The humility in these two men, Peter and Paul, and

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<sup>264</sup> It is comforting and reassuring to see that following this bold display Paul is told by the Lord, “take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”(23:11). Could it be that Paul was suffering from a let-down like every other preacher has experienced after a bold outpouring of truth? We know that this can happen even when the audience is not hostile.



certainly every one that God uses, is born out of the pain of wounds brought on by the failure of self-assurance and self-confidence. Whereas the preacher is meant to be a warrior, the warrior is most effective who is also a wounded warrior.

What is the source of this boldness, which will today's Biblical/Missional preachers setting to speak clearly without fear of repercussion? There is a dual stream that allows boldness to grow. As in much of the Christian pilgrimage, it is the holy synergism that we find in Philippians 2:12-13, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Boldness comes from God and from us as we obey God.

On the Divine side of this synergism, our boldness in preaching derives from knowing that I am called and commissioned by God and that I am speaking the message from God. The preacher's confidence, comes from being called, chosen, and commissioned to speak in the name of the Lord, on behalf of the Lord. The preacher stands to speak. The message is studied and prepared. The preacher has studied and prayed. The audience sits waiting, some expectantly, others bored, and still others wait with a predetermined resistance to whatever it is the preacher is going to say. The preacher may be young and freshly brought to the congregation with little or no experience, only a diploma. He may be seasoned by a thousand sermons. None of this should matter. The all that has been given to the preacher and he has humbly accepted it. The promises of God's attendance upon the message and his presence with the preacher have been heard and believed. The ultimate outcome of victory and

the guaranteed accomplishment of the missional word are assured. Like Christ, who set his face toward Jerusalem to accomplish his task of redemption, the preacher's face is set, not with human determination, or a positive mental attitude, or some buoyancy of self-esteem, but in the Word Who was sent and Who spoke and Who has called and who is present in that moment and Who will get all the glory.

The preacher must have this bold confidence in our culture that is suspicious of, fears, and generally teaches us to reject authority. Both listeners and speakers have come to believe that all authority is an abuse of power. Richard Lischer writes, "We think that if we approach preaching in a spirit of dialogue, disclaiming the obligation to move anyone toward anything the need for authority will vanish." But this is to forget or to ignore the fact that true authority in preaching has nothing to do with the style or form of preaching. Authority in preaching, "comes from the word of the gospel mediated by the church."<sup>265</sup> It is the same authority seen in Jesus when he "cast out demons, raised the dead, forgave sins, and commissioned" the disciples, and us, to take the gospel to all people. The preacher does not give the message its authority; the message brings its own authority and stamps that authority on the preacher who is a herald for the Original and Eternal Word. Although the Church has mediated the word to us and has passed it down to us through the ages, the church doesn't grant authority to either the preacher of the Word or the Word preached. The preacher's authority comes from the unabrogated commission from Christ to His Church through all ages.

We none can claim the same immediacy of the commission that the apostles received. None of us walked with him on the shores of Galilee and heard him say,

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<sup>265</sup> Lischer, *Theology of Preaching*, 61.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”(Matthew 28:18,19) Nor did we stand on the mount of ascension and hear him order us “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.... [until] you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:4, 8) None of us were struck down and cast off of our donkey in mid-trip to Damascus (or any other city I dare say) and afterward heard the Lord Jesus declare that “he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” (Acts 9:15,16) The apostles had a clear call and commission.<sup>266</sup> But as William Carey so passionately argued nearly two hundred years ago Christ’s commission to Go still stands.<sup>267</sup> Pierre Ch. Marcel catches the confidence of the Apostolic commission that should be ours today in this string of texts,

For I would have you to know, brethren,” he writes, “that the gospel which was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ”(Gal. 1:11-12). “As men of sincerity, as commissioned by God in the sight of God, we speak in Christ” (II Cor. 2:17). “Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God.” (I Thess. 4:8) He wrote thus to the Thessalonians: we give thanks that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God.” (I Thess. 2:13)<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Paul holds his apostolic commission very highly see Ro 1:1; 1 Co 1:1; 2 Co 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1. He is called, commanded, and serves as the will of God. Peter identifies himself as an apostle in both of his general letters.

<sup>267</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, 1792 <http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/enquiry.html> (accessed December 5, 2001).

<sup>268</sup> Pierre Ch. Marcel, *The Relevancy of Preaching*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963), 14.

Neither the herald nor the ambassador is self-sent. The going out is by call and commission, and the sent one has been given a trust. The herald-ambassador is first entrusted and then sent out. The boldness of the preacher begins with the weight of knowing that the King of kings is caller, commissioner, and sender. The boldness is nothing less than a divinely imparted and delegated authority. The messenger may be rejected, and both Biblical and contemporary history show that many have been. But it is not truly the rejection of the messenger; it is the rejection first of the message-giver. Surely Peter and the other disciples remembered and passed on the words of commission given by Jesus in Luke 9:16 to those who came after them: “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” The preacher who accepts the commission as a herald of the King stands in a long line of both faithful and rejected ambassadors. Each one who is called is given confidence in the precious privilege of speaking for the King. William Perkins, writing over 400 years ago, brings words that still encourage and motivate today:

...a sense of the high privilege of their calling strengthens all true ministers in the face of the scorn and contempt which wicked men throw in their faces like mud. They can be content with this: they are the men God has called to declare the gift of righteousness. Even those who scorn and despise the ministry can possess righteousness only by means of a poor minister! So do your duty, and those who mock will have cause to honor you.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, 106. He writes: “This should encourage students to consecrate themselves to the ministry. What calling has as great a responsibility as this, ‘to declare unto man his righteousness’? Of course in this perverse world you are undervalued (if it highly valued you it would not be so perverse!). But you are honoured (*sic*) in the hearts of all God’s children, and even in the consciences of some who malign you. Thousands, when they die, will bless you, who earlier in their lives were indifferent to you. The devil himself envies you, and even the holy angels admire the honor of your calling because you have power ‘to declare unto man his righteousness’.”

This commission is not a call from an unknown king. If the call came with no return address, there could be an accusation of dereliction of duty or failure in the field. Anonymity in the call was not the experience of the apostolic witnesses and it is not ours either. Peter walked with Jesus, Paul knew the Word-giver of the Jewish Scriptures, and we like, them, have Christ's illuminating Spirit to lead us into deeper and more intimate knowledge of the One who calls. Those whose call seems vague or whose confidence is flagging need only to come back to their quest to know God. Confidence comes from knowing the calling One. Not only do we seek to know the character of God the sender, but also we long to know the pleasure and approval of God. Boldness comes when we seek and love the smile of God. What a terrible approbation falls on the one who forgets the source of the commission and sinks to pleasing the audience. Paul tells the Galatians that if he begins to seek the approval of men, he will no longer be seeking the approval of God (Gal. 1:10). I is "not our congregations before whom we shall stand on the Judgment Day, but God Almighty himself. We will have to give an account of how we have discharged our responsibilities as preachers of the Gospel."<sup>270</sup> Boldness is engendered by this constant realization. There will always be the temptation to fear man. There will always be resistance and threats. There will be antagonists, cultured despisers, and opponents more capable than we are to challenge us. Still, like the Apostles we go on boldly for the King. Like them our boldness flows from the confidence that it is God

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25. <sup>270</sup> John Cheeseman, *The Priority of Preaching*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006),

who is at work fulfilling His own commission through the preaching of His messengers.<sup>271</sup>

### Emotions in Preaching

We are called to faithfulness to the commission and the promise of the commission fulfilled becomes part of the fuel of our boldness and confidence. This promised outcome is no excuse for a passionless or emotionless preaching. We read nine places in Acts where the Apostles' preaching is described by *diamartyromai* a word meaning "to warn". Robert L. Dabney exhorted his students to remember and reminds us that the preacher

professes to stand between the living and the dead. He deals with the attributes of a jealous and majestic God, the destiny of souls to immortal bliss or woe...the tomb, the resurrection trump, the judgment-bar, the righteous Judge, the glories of heaven and the gloom of hell, the gospel's cheering sound, the sacred tears of Gethsemane, the blood of Calvary and the sweet yet awful breathings of the Holy Ghost. The preacher's mission is to lay hold of perishing men, and by the love of the Redeemer drag them from the pit. His only motive is disinterested zeal, and if he harbours any other, he is compelled for decency's sake to conceal it and affect the former.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> David Jackman comes at our confidence as preachers from the aspect of the guaranteed success of the Church, the Bride of Christ. Commenting on Rev 19:6-9, he writes, There will be a bride; there will be a wedding feast. 'These are the true words of God.' So, this must always be the ultimate perspective we have to bring to bear on the present and future, both immediate and eternal. This is cause enough for us to be optimists; to go on, not irrationally but faithfully, believing God is drawing a great multitude of people to himself, and that they will be innumerable on the last day. We do not know how it will work out and we cannot see the game plan. But we do know what the outcome will be. The result is absolutely certain, so we can be confident in playing our part in the light of God's unquestionable fulfillment of his promises to Abraham and all who are his offspring through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.. David Jackman, "The Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Preaching the Living Word*, David Jackman ed., (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 186-187).

<sup>272</sup> Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence*, 296. We need to hold in balance our passion and desire for the salvation of souls with the sovereign choice of the One who saves. It is far too easy to allow our passion to become confused with soul-winning responsibility of preaching. H.H. Farmer, *Servant of the Word*, 18, speaks of the confidence of preaching and adds, "If what has been said is true at all, the preacher is one upon whom the saving strategy of God in Christ, in relation both to the individual and even to universal history, may at any moment turn, and that remains a heavy responsibility, no matter how confident we may be that the effectiveness of our preaching, if it has any, is entirely of God and not of ourselves. God may indeed use the foolishness of preaching but we are under obligation to see that it is not more foolish than it need be."

Charles Spurgeon called this urgency in preaching earnestness and emphasized its importance by telling students in his Preacher's College, "If I were asked—What in a Christian minister is the most essential quality for securing success in winning souls to Christ? —I should reply, 'earnestness: and if I were asked a second or third time, I should not vary the answer...'”<sup>273</sup> When we read the book of Acts we see the Apostles as real men filled with real human emotions. In addition to their urgent warnings we read that Paul was troubled (16:18) and distressed (17:16). When he makes his defense before the Roman governor Felix (24:10) he does so cheerfully. Showing our emotions as we preach helps us relay the content of the message and to connect with the audience, if we use them honestly and unaffectedly. Emotions, like words, are not meant to be manipulative tools. They are vehicles that help us show how the message that we proclaim affects us. It is especially important in Western postmodern culture with its deep-seated suspicions, free-flowing cynicism, and rampant doubt to present the Truth with authenticity and transparency. Our emotions, rightly harnessed and used will do that.<sup>274</sup> Added to our concern for a proper transparency will be the cultivation of humility before both God and our audience. It is a humility that shows itself in our complete dependence upon God and desire for his honor as we seek to bring the good news to our audience.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008, One volume reprint of three volumes first published 1875-1894), 374.

<sup>274</sup> David Kinnamon and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 55-66, for one study on the importance of transparency to the today's youth culture of the United States.

<sup>275</sup> Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 [reprint of 1846 edition]), 224. "This habit of dependence must continue to the end. We can no more prepare ourselves after grace received, than before it. He who 'is the Author,' must be 'the finisher of faith.' (Heb. xii. 2). He is 'Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end' (Rev. i. 8), in this Almighty work. Our happiness and prosperity in the humbling acknowledgement of praise—'By the grace God I

## Rationality in Preaching

One of the most often heard criticisms of the recent intellectual method of Modernity or the Enlightenment Project is that it was too rationalistic in its approach.<sup>276</sup> The criticism comes from adherents of Eastern religions, philosophical post-moderns and evangelical pietists.<sup>277</sup> The foundation for these critics is a mistrust of intellectual certainty and the so called objective, “cold facts” approach taken in modernity at the expense of individual and personal feelings, tradition and, and even faith. In the West, and those parts of the Eastern academic world where Enlightenment thinking have taken root there has been a growing lack of confidence in modernity’s presuppositions and assertions that has followed on the heels of the implosion of Enlightenment confidence.

Others claim that we have changed in the way that we receive information. For this reason it is suggested that the use of reason, linear discourse and, rational argument no longer have a place in preaching. Some churches have abandoned all linear discourse for a running commentary on a topic with discussion and dialogical interaction with the congregation. One pastor uses community dialogue in place of traditional exegetical sermon preparation allowing “the community [to lead] the pastor so that the pastor can lead the community.” Another has determined to leave

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am what I am.’ (I Cor. xv. 10). Dependence is not the excuse for indolence, but the spring of active energy.”

<sup>276</sup> Bryan A Follis, *Truth with Love, The Apologetics of Francis A Schaeffer*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), has given us a valuable study of the use of rationalism combined with a heart of compassion in evangelism. See also Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Right Reason and the Princeton Mind, An unorthodox Proposal*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), for a case study on the historical foundations of rationality in American evangelicalism.

<sup>277</sup> See D. G. Hart, *the Lost Soul of American Protestantism*, (Lanham MD: Bowman and Littlefield, 2002, and Michael Horton, *In the Face of God, The Dangers & Delights of Spiritual Intimacy*, (Waco, TX: Word, 1996), for discussions on the ways that the subjectivism of Pietism and the age-old temptations of Gnosticism have eroded confidence in a rational approach to Christianity in favor of a more emotionally driven other worldly approach of mysticism.



preaching completely out of the worship service while others use a mix of symbols, images, and mystery to convey the gospel message.<sup>278</sup> This comes from a commitment that new types of communication technologies “are the very essence of how people construct their worlds.”<sup>279</sup>

While it is true that people are receiving information in different forms, that they have lost confidence in rational argument, and that they are more accepting of narrative, loopy logic<sup>280</sup>, and increasingly have a difficulty connecting with a linear presentation of an abstract message, we must take seriously the reality that the New Testament presents its message of truth in exactly these rationalistic ways. We read that the apostles reasoned (17:2; 18:4, 19; 19:8, 9; 24:25), disputed (19:19, 29; 24:12), persuaded (13:43; 17:4; 18:4; 19:8, 26; 26:28; 28:23, 24), proved and explained (11:4; 17:3; 18:26; 28:23), and even confounded (2:6; 9:22; 21:27; 21:31). Biblical-Missional preaching is rational and reasoning.<sup>281</sup> David Hilborn<sup>282</sup> gives reasons why expository preaching should be abandoned:

1. Expository Preaching is rationalistic and takes more mental discipline than postmoderns are willing to give it.
2. Expository Preaching is elitist appealing only to those intellectuals who have a sufficient concentration span and can track linear logic. This audience is only five per cent of the world and excludes the remaining 95% of world’s population. He claims that since the growth of the Church is primarily in places where linear thinking and Expository Preaching is not used we should follow suit.

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<sup>278</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 165, 229.

<sup>279</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 20. Doug Pagitt, *Preaching in the Inventive Age*, (Minneapolis, MN: Sparkhouse Press, 2010), rejects all preaching, as we have known it, for dialogue.

<sup>280</sup> This phrase is used in a personal letter from Thomas Bandy to the author.

<sup>281</sup> Gibbs and Bolger *Emerging Churches*, 20. “Faithful mission practice requires an understanding of the *language* of culture.” They mean that we need to focus more on the methods of communication than on the words. We need to “communicate...to a culture whose primary language consists in sound, visual images, and experience, in addition to words. Meaningful activity assumes the convergence of sound, sight, and touch through rituals, and stories.”

<sup>282</sup> David Hilborn, *Picking up the Pieces*, (Hodder and Stoughton 1997).

3. In addition, Expository Preaching is authoritarian. "Postmoderns wish to affirm the validity of all insights and emphases. A didactic monologue feels altogether like an assertion of power. Political Correctness now requires an open listening attitude characterized by dialogue and consensus, rather than proclamation by a single individual in a clerical gown"
4. Expository Preaching is unBiblical. He appeals as an argument to Jesus' use of parable and narrative and not what we know as expository preaching.

Roy Clements responds to these assertions by reminding us that regardless of our culture's communication modes, it is still true that the Bible itself is given to us in "words, concepts, and ideas", not in images and symbols.<sup>283</sup> Although we are being told that the Reformation contextualized the gospel to the print era<sup>284</sup> as though there was no written Word before Gutenberg, we must argue that the Word of God was originally given as both spoken and written words. These were not merely randomly organized words, they are given to us in propositional statements, sentences, and authoritative declarations and warnings with very clear if/then contrasts. How does one symbolize for example, Jesus is Lord? What image would be used to declare "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God"? Is the church truly growing without exposition of propositional statements such as: "I am God there is no other," "In the beginning God created heaven and earth," "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised," "be holy as I am holy," and "You must be born again."?

It is true that Scripture has a great deal of parabolic, poetic, and narrative material. However, this material is not meant to stand on its own, but rather to be understood as illustrative of propositional statements. God himself has placed these sections in Scripture as expositions of propositions. An expository sermon is made up of

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<sup>283</sup> Roy Clements, "Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World", *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23:2 1999, pp 174-182.

<sup>284</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 20.

sentences that describe and explain the meaning of a text. Like the Apostles we preach expositively by using sentences and logical arguments to persuade, argue, and reason with our audience that what we are saying is true. Symbols and images are only as clear as they are tied to a commonly understood reference point.<sup>285</sup> The stakes are too high for us to assume that our audience understands images and symbols. The proponent of abandoning preaching that contains propositional statements, logical assertions, and appeals to reason by arguing that his audience does not communicate in these thought forms is guilty of the same elitist attitude with which he charges the modernist preacher. The modernist is accused of arrogance by forcing his audience to hear him from a particular intellectual framework. Those who say that our audience “can’t get it” through logical, reasoned, and persuasive argument is equally himself guilty of an arrogant condescension by assuming less of his audience’s ability than may be reality. A patronizing methodology will never win the battle for the mind or the heart. Roy Clements reminds us that even though Jesus used a great deal of parabolic material, it is not the only way he taught and it is certainly not the only method of teaching in the rest of

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<sup>285</sup> Douglas Groothuis, “Truth Defined and Defended,” *Reclaiming the Center*, Millard J. Erickson, ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 68. “Truth, then, is an exclusive property that is not shared by all assertions. But what exactly possesses this property? What is a truth-bearer? A truth-bearer must be unit of conceptual meaning. To grasp this, we need to distinguish sentences from propositions. A sentence may be written, spoken, or thought in the mind (without an external linguistic indicator). Declarative sentences, unlike questions or commands, stake claims on reality by stipulating that such-and-such is the case. A proposition is what a declarative sentence asserts; that is, what it means. Different sentences in the same language may have the same propositional content, such as ‘Jesus is Lord’ and ‘the Lord is Jesus.’ If a sentence is translated faithfully from one language to another—say from New Testament Greek to English—both sentences mean the same thing; that is, they assert the same proposition. Language cannot get on without propositions, since so much of language involves targeting facts with words. (parag) Therefore, propositions, we might say, are the ultimate bearers of truth; but since our declarative statements and thoughts are propositional by nature, they too, in a derivative sense, are truth-bearers. In a more existential sense, persons may be truth-bearers as well, since persons hold beliefs and make them known through words in speech and writing.”

the New Testament. At the same time we are wise to remember the use of the emotions and seek to not only reach the intellect but the will and the heart as well. Finally we must remember that we speak authoritatively because the message we bring is not our own—we are ambassadors.

### CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

One begins to appreciate Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 12:12, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body," in a new way when embarking on the study of preaching. Many pastors have multiple volumes on their bookshelf on the subject of sermon preparation, homiletic theory, delivery, exegesis, and even collections of sermons. These volumes may reflect the most contemporary approaches or they may be repositories of ancient and tested wisdom. Every preacher would smile reading Mike Abendroth's introduction when he writes, "I have sixty evangelical books on preaching (and more liberal ones I didn't count).<sup>1</sup> Jay Adams wrote of the many shelves of preaching books he consulted in researching one of his books.<sup>2</sup> Neither of these totals exhausts the number of books that have been written on this important topic. Overviews and analyses of contemporary culture are equally numerous. Perhaps even more books have been written defining and describing the culture since they are not limited to a specific audience or disciplinary framework as are the works directed at Evangelical Preachers.

The purpose of this paper is to determine the nature of Biblical Preaching in an Age of Mission. The Mission Age in which the Church presently finds itself in Western Europe and North America is generally described as Post-Modern, Post-Christian or Post-Christendom.

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Abendroth, *Jesus Christ: The Prince of Preachers*, (Leominster, Great Britain: Day One Publications, 2008), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Jay Adams, *How to Get the Most out of a Sermon*, (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 3.

Works on preaching were perused for this study with the goal of finding ways that their authors might have approached preaching from the stand-point of what the Bible tells us about preaching. These book were also read from the standpoint of determining how preaching today can intersect effectively with the present-day audience. Cultural analyses were primarily limited to those books that describe the current cultural setting in the European-North America milieu from a Christian world-view. The author of this paper limits this review to three primary categories. The first will concern cultural analysis; the second will concern preaching methods, and the third is a broad category of books that deal specifically with the philosophical foundations and the practical ramifications of Post-Modernity. This third category will include the works of Lesslie Newbigin and his disciples, represented by the Gospel and Our Cultural Network.

### **Cultural Analysis**

In this first category, there are two authors who approach the same set of materials from opposing ends of the spectrum, while claiming to hold to an historically Evangelical evangelistic commitment. David Wells has written a series of five books and Brian McLaren has written twice that number. The more popular of the two is easily Brian McLaren. He is certainly seen as more engaging, tolerant, and hip. David Wells, on the other hand, can be judged as backward looking, grumpy, and intellectually challenging. A quick look at Amazon.com's best selling books ranking for both authors shows that McLaren consistently ranks higher than Wells in the number of books sold. The two authors have different purposes. Wells is tracing what he sees as the downslide and dilution of Evangelicalism from a truth-based, truth-seeking, truth-defending movement

to a more culture-friendly, feel-good, therapeutic, and pragmatic market-driven enterprise. McLaren wants to free Christianity from what he sees as a Western European culturally controlled and ideologically driven captive Christianity. Defining himself as an evangelist first and foremost, McLaren is quite open to positing the Christian faith not in traditional forms but in ways that are broader and more accepting and tolerant of both atheistic philosophical paradigms and non-Christian religions.

### **Brian McLaren**

Brian McLaren gives us his culturally relevant and sensitive approach to Christianity in an engaging trilogy published by Jossey-Bass between 2001 and 2005. McLaren calls his books “tales.” In these tales he traces the spiritual journey of his protagonist, Dan Poole, through his friendship with Dr. Neil Edward Oliver (or Neo as he is known in these books.) This journey takes Dan, a struggling, weary, and frustrated baby-boomer pastor from the dissatisfaction of his traditional, North American culture and modernity-shaped Evangelicalism into a wider, gentler, more honest, and satisfying Christianity that takes into account the philosophical paradigm offered by postmodernist thinkers.<sup>3</sup> McLaren also wrote more straightforward works on ministry and culture: *The Church on the Other Side* (1998, 2000); and evangelism: *Finding Faith* (1999) and *More Ready than You Realize* (2002). His more recent books, *Adventures in Missing the Point* (with Tony Campolo, 2003), *Generous Orthodoxy* (2004), *The Secret Message of Jesus* (2007), *Finding Our Way Again*, (2008), and *A New Kind of Christianity* (2010) apply his

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<sup>3</sup> Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian, a Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), *The Story we Find Ourselves In, Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), *The Last Word and the Word After That, A Tale of Faith, Doubt and a New Kind of Christianity*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

culture-friendly, postmodernism-accepting, and post-liberalism to the whole of Christian understanding and practice.<sup>4</sup>

There is a progression in McLaren that conservative evangelicals should find troubling. In his earlier books (1998-2002) McLaren both lays a groundwork for understanding the challenge of postmodern thought for the Church and offers examples of how to both counter its errors and use it when possible for both the ministry of the church and for evangelism. In *Finding Faith* he offers a “self-discovery guide” for individuals to follow in their spiritual quest. This book doesn’t depart much from others that have preceded it in what might be referred to as soft apologetics, the attempt to gently answer questions and objections to Christianity. Faith, doubt, the exclusivistic claims of Christianity, spiritual disciplines, and cautions about the established church are discussed without dodging the problems of atheism, evil, suffering, and Christians who are poor examples of the faith they claim to believe and live.

In *More Ready than You Realize*, McLaren works hard to show how he would apply the principles from *Finding Faith* within a protracted evangelistic conversation with a young woman who is seeking to know how to believe in Christianity. His goal is to show us how to be good evangelists. Good evangelists are people who

engage others in good conversations about important and profound topics such as faith, values, hope, meaning, purpose, goodness, beauty, truth, life after death, life before death, and God. [People] do this....because they feel they are in fact sent by

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<sup>4</sup> Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998, 2000), *Finding Faith, A Self-Discovery Guide for Your Spiritual Quest*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), *More Ready than You Realize*, *Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), with Tony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel*, (Grand Rapids, MI: EmergentYS Books, Published by Zondervan, 2003), *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan [EmergentYS Books] 2004), *Secret Message of Jesus; Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), and Phyllis Tickle, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of Ancient Practices*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), *A New Kind of Christianity, Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010).



God to do so. They live with a sense of mission that their God-given calling in life is...[to] live unselfishly and well *and* to help others live unselfishly too. Evangelists are people with a mission from God and a passion to love and serve their neighbors. They want to change the world.<sup>5</sup>

McLaren wants us to be more like Jesus “who came to us on our terms, spoke our language and crossed the bridge to meet us where we were.”<sup>6</sup> Here is the natural and indispensable beginning place for a good witness and preaching—speaking the language of the listener. We will say more about this when we consider the impact of Lesslie Newbigin.

Throughout *More Ready than You Realize* McLaren calls for and models humility, patience, listening skills, compassion, and a sincere care for the non-believer. He challenges the reader to think hard about insider language, arrogance, not making evangelism merely a set of logical propositions that tries to put the object of the message (whom he calls a victim) into a position of winning or losing an argument. Near the end of the book he summarizes with eight factors “for helping people feel a little of God’s love,” which is a much lighter or thinner definition of evangelism than he used at the start of the book. Two of these factors foreshadow troubling themes that will be worked out in later books: the hesitation to make a clear and distinct statement about both heaven and hell, and the idea that salvation is more about God bringing a people to himself than it is rescuing individuals from the consequences of their rebellion against God.<sup>7</sup>

Beginning with *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* and continuing with *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a*

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<sup>5</sup> Brian McLaren, *Finding Faith, a Self-Discovery Guide for your Spiritual Quest*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 14. McLaren is far too reluctant to deal with sin and the necessity for redemption in this definition and the ensuing conversations in this book.

<sup>6</sup> Brian McLaren, *More Ready than You Realize* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 3.

<sup>7</sup> McLaren, *More Ready than You Realize*, 134ff.

*Spiritual Journey*, Brian McLaren lays out his understanding and summary of the slippery and amorphous world-view of the postmodern. These are helpful books if taken alone. McLaren shows how modernity and post-modernity are contrasted and calls the church and those doing ministry in the “post-modern matrix” to know how the playing field for evangelistic encounter has shifted. Not only has it shifted and become muddy and slippery, many of us are trying to play a night game on a field without proper lighting. To help his reader see some of the changes that have taken place in the discourse of the postmodern setting, McLaren uses fiction to tell how narrative has become much more important than traditional linear and logical argument. His main characters are engaging and inviting. At the same time, some of the points raised by Neo, McLaren’s most influential character, and a thinly veiled reflection of his own personality, challenge several commonly held Evangelical assumptions and convictions. Neo tries to lead the narrator and main character, Dan Poole, to see the differences in the contrasting world-views of Enlightenment-shaped Evangelicalism and the emerging postmodernity.

The trilogy becomes more troubling for the traditional evangelical in the second and third books. McLaren explores both creation/evolution and the doctrine and existence of Hell in such a way that the reader will find it very difficult to know exactly where McLaren, the author and thinker, stands on any issue he raises. He will often have a character make a statement and then leave it unchallenged by anyone else in the narrative. Other times he will quote an expert author’s opinion only for the reader to discover in the end notes of the book (and how many readers of fiction are used to checking footnotes?) that these authors do not exist and that McLaren has invented the

author, the work quoted, and the text. At best, readers will find this misdirection to be disingenuous, and at worst dishonest.<sup>8</sup> It is the same technique that Dan Brown used so successfully to teach his readers his theories in *The DaVinci Code*. McLaren lessens his own effectiveness as a cultural commentator by refusing to allow himself to be pinned down in his books by precise statements of his own beliefs. An example of this is shown by the subtitle of his 2006 book, *Generous Orthodoxy*—"Why I am a missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/Calvinist + Anabaptist/Angelican + Methodist + catholic + green + Incarnational + depresses-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished CHRISTIAN."<sup>9</sup> There is a subtle and sad postmodern hubris in this subtitle that is born out in the introduction to the book where he writes,

The subtitle of this book creates a term so awkward and confusing that it's certain not to catch on. Which is a good thing, because what we need is not new sectarian terminology or new jargon of a new elitist clique...What we need is something lived, not just talked or written about. The last thing we need is a new group of proud, super protestant, hyper-puritan, ultra restorationist reformers who say 'Only we've got it right.'<sup>10</sup>

So far so good—most everyone would agree with this sentiment. However, in the next paragraph he goes on to say

The word *orthodoxy* means 'straight thinking' or 'right opinion.'<sup>11</sup> The last thing I want covenant, charismatic, whatever) or methodology (cell church, megachurch, liturgical church, seeker church, blah, blah, blah) is right (meaning approaching or

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<sup>8</sup> Greg D. Gilbert, "Saved from the Wrath of God: An Examination of Brian McLaren's Approach to the Doctrine of Hell," 245-268, Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason, *Reforming or Conforming*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 247.

<sup>9</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan [EmergentYS Books], 2004), Title Page.

<sup>10</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Actually, orthodoxy means correct or true glory [worship]. McLaren shows the importance of defining one's terms for the purpose of argument. One wonders how his comments might change if he used a different and accurate definition.

achieving timeless technical perfection.) hence, the important adjective *generous* in the title of this book.<sup>12</sup>

It doesn't take long to realize that McLaren's generosity is a pseudo-humility of non-conviction, non-precision, and theological commitment of those who have come before him and represented and guarded the orthodoxy that he seeks to redefine (he would say, 'positively deconstruct and rebuild according to new hermeneutical rules') for nearly two millennia. Why else would he reduce serious and heart-felt theological discourse to a disparaging "blah, blah, blah?" This is not to suggest that traditional protestant and evangelical orthodoxy are beyond or above critique, as the five titles surveyed below by David Wells show. It is meant to point out a distancing and disengaging from the past in favor of the new and wider paradigm of postmodernism and thus becomes subject to C.S. Lewis' approbation—"chronological snobbery."<sup>13</sup>

When we come to McLaren's view of Scripture, he is again imprecise and seemingly unwilling to stand with twentieth century formulations of Biblical Authority. While on the one hand he affirms Paul's description of Scripture as God-breathed,<sup>14</sup> he does not want to use "extrabiblical words" such as inerrant, authoritative, literal, revelatory, objective, absolute, propositional, etc." to intensify that description.<sup>15</sup> At the same time he utilizes Stanley Grenz' extrabiblical terminology of "narrative trajectory"<sup>16</sup> to explain the Bible's hard and unpleasant stories (such as the bloody invasion and conquest of Canaan) and to soften the harshness that we read in and into them today by justifying those biblical stories according a more primitive and violent past cultural

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<sup>12</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1984), 207-208.

<sup>14</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 160-162.

<sup>15</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 164-165.

<sup>16</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 170.

context. One would much rather, as a preacher seeking to have an authoritative base for preaching, have the explanation presented through the grid of God the author's own purposes and character. God does not need to be defended by appealing to cultural contexts when He, Himself, is the author (by McLaren's own admission) and the prime mover behind these stories.

In other places McLaren writes as a modernist who wants to defend the Biblical metanarrative while at the same time writing as a postmodern pluralist who grants all metanarratives equal footing and authority. In *The Last Word and the Word After That*, Neo talks about the "larger realities in which the Bible exists, especially the larger story that carries each biblical statement"<sup>17</sup> in such a way as to suggest that this larger story is an all-encompassing and world-explaining metanarrative. In the earlier *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, Neo says of the Biblical account of creation,

True it's not the only story that tries to explain where we are, who we are, and why. There are other stories, similar in many ways and profoundly different too...if you get a feel for this story we find ourselves in [the Biblical account], I think you'll come to realize that it has room for all the other stories too. It doesn't exclude them, mock them, or despise them. I believe it's the story in which all other stories can find themselves too.<sup>18</sup>

McLaren accepts both the story aspect of the Scriptures and that they are set in historical context. Then surprisingly he says this Bible story "can't be objectively proven *but*"<sup>19</sup>...can subjectively ring true and make sense of our lives."<sup>20</sup> Denying that there is any absoluteness to revelation, he writes that "The Bible [is] comprised...of 100 percent stories, poetry, personal letters, et cetera [and] not even .01 percent of the Bible is

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<sup>17</sup> McLaren, *The last Word and the Word After That*, 44.

<sup>18</sup> McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>20</sup> McLaren and Campolo, *Missing the Point*, 239.

present[ed] as...objective truth about God.”<sup>21</sup> One wonders how McLaren would classify the *Shema*, the Ten Commandments, Jesus’ declaration “Your Word is Truth” in the High Priestly Prayer (John 17:17) or the bold assertion “God who does not lie” (Titus 1:2) to name only four absolute and propositional statements.

Albert Mohler reminds us how important a vibrant confidence in the authority and credibility of Scripture is when he writes,

Ultimately preaching will cease to be Christian preaching if the preacher loses confidence in the authority of the Bible as the Word of God and in the power of the spoken word to communicate the saving and transforming message of the Bible. The preacher must stand up and speak with confidence, declaring the Word of God to a congregation that is bombarded with thousands of words each week.<sup>22</sup>

This powerfully transforming declaration of Truth will not happen if the Bible is something that merely “rings true” for me. Brian McLaren is both lionized and vilified by the evangelical press. His books seek to present a ‘new kind’ of Christianity that is philosophically user-friendly to the postmodern mindset. He attempts too much and loses his center and sounds more like a 20<sup>th</sup> century mainline liberal protestant than a member of the evangelical camp. McLaren not only describes post-modernism, he gives evidence of accepting its tenets and uses them to create his own version of Christianity. Still, his sensitivity to the honest questioner and spiritual seeker offers both direction and challenges for preachers steeped in modernity.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> McLaren and Campolo, *Missing the Point*, 238.

<sup>22</sup> Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 17.

<sup>23</sup> For further (and insightful) engagement with McLaren and the thinking of the Emergent Church leaders, see Donald A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church, Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005); Dan Kimball with Foreword by Rick Warren, and Brian McLaren *The Emerging Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan [EmergentYS Books] 2003); R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: the Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005); Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason, *Reforming or Conforming? Post Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

## David Wells

Coming from the opposite end of the Evangelical continuum, David Wells presents a stunning, wide-ranging, almost epic look at our culture with a critical eye that is always on Scripture and its inherent moral base. Wells shows how the Evangelical community has crumbled in its adherence to truth and intellectual pursuit and opted for a feel-good, pragmatic, impress-the-world-mentality that undercuts its ability to speak with authority or integrity in our world. A prolific writer and frequent contributor to a variety of theological works, Wells has written what will certainly be counted as his *magnum opus* in a five book series including, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*, *God in the Wasteland: the Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, *Losing our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover its Moral Vision*, *Above all Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World*, and *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*<sup>24</sup>

In the first two books Wells shows how the loosening of adherence to truth, both as a concept and as necessity for truth-speaking or truth-telling, in our society. While there was little surprise that truth (absolute and objective) was a fading reality in the world at large when Wells began to write these books in 1993, he did raise both eyebrows and hackles when he pointed to the demise of truth within the truth-protecting world of Evangelicalism. The Evangelical world had fought for academic acceptance, cultural credibility, and political clout from the 1950s through the late 1980s. What was not clearly seen at the time of this ascent to acceptability was that there was an almost

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<sup>24</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

completely wholesale buy-in of modernity's values and ways. As Os Guinness says both with his title and the contents of his *Dining with the Devil: How the Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity*,<sup>25</sup> those who sup with the devil need a long spoon. Evangelicalism, according to Wells (and also to Guinness) did not have nearly a long enough spoon. The causalities from this immoderate dining (or even feasting) have been a loss of truth, a rise inhuman centeredness in all aspects of theology, preaching, and eventually even the "visibility of God." Contrasted to the ebullient optimism of formulaic guaranteed successes coming from Church Growth practitioners, Wells struck a death knell of pessimism. The following sentences from the introduction to *Whatever Happened to Truth* set the stage for the stream of argument that Wells followed through the end of *God in the Wasteland*.

It is because many Evangelicals believe in the innocence of modern culture [which he will also refer to as modernity in all his books] and for that reason exploit it and are exploited by it that they are unable to believe in all the truth that once characterized...Protestant orthodoxy. In the current typology, Evangelicals are typically moderns in their orientation...This...orientation leads to a stark difference in faith. The stream of historic orthodoxy that many fail to recognize as worldliness because the cultural innocence with which it presents itself. [The result is that] we now have less biblical fidelity, less interest in truth, less seriousness, less depth and less capacity to speak the Word of God to our own generation in a way that offers an alternative to what it already thinks. The older orthodoxy was driven by a passion for truth...the newer evangelicalism is not driven by the same passion for truth, and that is why it is often empty of theological interest.<sup>26</sup>

Wells then goes on to tell us that he is not interested in theology alone, but a theology that is driven by a passion for truth. These first two books then are designed to answer the questions, "Why has the passion for truth diminished?" and "Why is it that

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<sup>25</sup> Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: How the Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> David Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 11-12.



contemporary Evangelicals suppose their faith will survive intact without this passion and this theology?”<sup>27</sup>

On his way to answering these questions, Wells reminds his readers that

...churches with roots in the Protestant reformation confess the truth that God has given to the church through the inspired Word of God. There may be disagreements about what the Bible teaches on any one subject, as well as how that teaching should be assembled, but there is unanimous agreement that this authoritative truth lies at the heart of Christian life and practice, for this is what it means to live under the authority of Scripture. It is this core of confession that the Church’s identity is preserved across the ages. This is the watchword by which it is known. Without this knowledge, it is bereft of what defines the church as the people of God, bereft of the means of belief, worship, sustenance, proclamation, and service.<sup>28</sup>

Wells made this statement about the confidence in the Word of God shown by Evangelicals over fifteen years ago. Today his statement could not be made with such certainty as our critique of Brian McLaren has shown. There is a reluctance and an aversion among the spokesmen of the Emergent movement to agree with people like Wells who affirm that there truly is truth, that truth is knowable, and truth is absolute and definable. Wells says that any “profession about the objective truth of God and His self-disclosure in the space-time world has become most awkward because of [our] attachment to Enlightenment habits...”<sup>29</sup> One wonders how McLaren and company with their almost militant rejection and disavowal of modernity would react to being classified as having “attachment to Enlightenment habits!”

After nearly 300 pages of cultural description and the attempt to answer these questions in *No Place for Truth*, Wells concludes that the cultural assimilation and inoculation of the church have resulted in an Evangelicalism that is emptied of a vision of

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<sup>27</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 99.

<sup>29</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 100.

God that could sustain it against further incursions of not only modernity but Postmodernity.<sup>30</sup> The Church must regain its passion for truth, a true and exalted view of God, and a proper view of self. These three together make up a proper theology, and evangelicalism has virtually emptied itself of all three, and "...where we emptied ourselves of theology, we have emptied ourselves of Christian seriousness in preaching, worship, piety, thought, and service."<sup>31</sup> Wells calls the church back to an earlier vibrancy.

Unless the evangelical Church can recover the knowledge of what it means to live before a holy God, unless in its worship it can relearn humility, wonder, love and praise, unless it can find again a moral purpose in the world that resonates with the holiness of God and that is accordingly deep and unyielding—unless the evangelical Church can do all of these things, theology will have no place in its life. But the reverse is also true. If the Church can begin to find a place for theology by refocusing itself on the centrality of God, if it can rest upon his sufficiency, if it can recover its moral fiber, then it will have something to say to a world now drowning in modernity.<sup>32</sup>

David Wells continues his theme of the necessity of a sense of the Holy in evangelicalism in the third book in this series, *Losing Our Virtue*.<sup>33</sup>

We often have little sense of the Holy as something Other that presses in upon us and demands that we give it our utmost earnest attention. In consequence, the older quest

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<sup>30</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 61, 67. Although Postmodernity is now a common term in discussion of culture and worldview, when Wells wrote it was only given a few paragraphs of consideration and explanation in the first book. Postmodernism occurs in these pages but primarily as a discussion of architecture, not philosophy. Wells does deal postmodernism/postmodernity at greater length in *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), and *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 292.

<sup>32</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 300.

<sup>33</sup> David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover its Moral Vision*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

for spiritual authenticity, for godliness, has often been abandoned and been replaced by newer quests for psychological wholeness. This transition commends itself to us because the outcome, a more whole and psychologically integrated person seems to be far more attuned to the dangerous and jarring world in which we live than are the older concerns about piety. And a more relaxing and amusing atmosphere in church seems like a better compensation for what we find in the world than that older piety which called for seriousness and self-examination in the light of God's Word.<sup>34</sup>

Wells tracks this loss of the Holy through the growing fascination and idolatry of self that was seen in Western culture in the twentieth century. He draws heavily from Philip Rieff's, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*,<sup>35</sup> to show how Americans have moved from morals to values, character to personality, and guilt to shame. Speaking of the choices available to us in every arena of life, Wells points to the reality that we are even seeking to choose who we will be in terms of personality, religion, and gender. For the Biblical preacher this formless void of self-invention calls for the necessity of speaking from a platform of certainty and absoluteness. One of the planks of this platform, it seems to this reviewer, is also a clear and strong understanding of *Imago Dei* in human beings. Here is the call again to confidence in the Scripture, the rock of certainty, and to say with boldness

this is the foundation of life, this is the touchstone, this is the anchor for your thinking and for your soul's health. This is the way, walk ye in it" but "here is a rub...people are used to being given choices—but in spiritual matters, in the final analysis of the state of the heart and life without God, there is no choice, the call to be made is to repent, to change the mind, to turn from the futility of sin and a life of rebellion to God. It is not merely a call to choose a new way of thinking, believing, acting and so forth.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

<sup>36</sup> Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 88. Wells uses pornography as one example of the varieties of choices that are presented to users as they seek the ultimate sexual high: Pornography is full of choices—every kink, every taboo, every fetish offered, every hair color, body size and age and racial group.

However, rather than evincing the same pessimism that was characteristic of his two earlier books, Wells gives a more hopeful perspective to this state of affairs in *Losing our Virtue*. He sees our setting as a great opportunity for the Gospel and for the preacher of the Gospel.

These chapters are written from the conviction that no time in the twentieth century has been riper with the opportunity for Christian faith. For the first time in this century, Christian faith is now without a serious secular opponent, if it can be allowed that postmodernity is now so heavy with its own cynicism as to be unsustainable for a very long time.<sup>37</sup> And later he writes in the same vein,

Today, a door of unprecedented opportunity is opening before the Church. In order to walk through this door, however, the Church must come to terms with life as it really is, and engage that life from an uncompromisingly biblical standpoint. This is easier said than done, because the cultural context in which we live favors those forms of spirituality, Christian and otherwise, that are marching to the tune of the 1990's culture, rather than those that are seeking to be faithful to the God of biblical revelation. What so many of these new spiritualities have in common is that they are offering benefits for the self and asking for little or no spiritual accountability. Designer religion of the 1990's allows itself to be tailored to each personality. It gives but never takes; it satisfies inner needs but never asks for repentance; it offers mystery and asks for no service. It provides a sense of Something Other in life but never requires that we stand before the Other.<sup>38</sup>

How will the Evangelical Church seize this evangelistic opportunity? It is not by accepting the moral void of postmodern society as a given, or by giving up the moral categories of the Scriptures. According to Wells the Church must become courageous enough to speak about sin in a world and to a generation for whom sin has become an impossibility. Sin must be defined and declared in Biblical terms. For unless there is a true understanding and acceptance of the existence and reality of sin as understood within

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<sup>37</sup> Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 80.

a “powerfully conceived moral vision of reality,” there can be no deep believing of the Gospel. Secondly, the Church itself is going to have to become more authentic morally. If the Church will be able to show the greatness of the Gospel, it must make it to be seen as a remedy of a great sickness. When Christians treat the Gospel of grace flippantly and as a trivial matter, when the Gospel seems to offer or effect so little change in the Church, it is no wonder that the world of unbelievers remain unbelievers. It is one thing to understand Christ deliverance cognitively or theoretically; it is quite another to see this worked out in life with depth and reality.<sup>39</sup>

Wells concludes this third book by asking, “Does the Church have the courage to become relevant by becoming Biblical? Is it willing to break with the cultural habits of the time and propose something quite absurd, like recovering both the word and the meaning of sin: Is it sagacious enough to be able to show how the postmodern world is trapped within itself?”<sup>40</sup> It can be if it comes back to the Word and leaves the world’s ways to the world. Here Wells concludes by returning to the thesis of his two previous books.

David Wells picks up themes that he began in his previous books in *Above All Earthly Powr’s*. In his earlier books (begun in the early 1990’s when “postmodernity” was not a part of the *lingua franca*), he spent the great majority of his space describing modernity and barely touched on the emergence of anything beyond the Enlightenment project. In this book written twelve years later, postmodernism had become a hot topic among Evangelicals. Wells set his course in *Above All Earthly Pow’rs*, by drawing together two cultural developments he sees impacting and defining American culture in a

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<sup>39</sup> Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 123.

<sup>40</sup> Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 199.

significant new way... “[T]he emergence of the postmodern ethos and the growing religious and spiritual diversity are defining the context within which the Church must live out its life. Already there are some signs that this engagement with the culture is not exactly going the Church’s way.”<sup>41</sup>

Wells, himself a careful thinker and penetrating analyst, says that the church has not been careful in thinking through how culture has affected its view of doctrine and its practice. Taking too much from the culture as though it is neutral and benign, the church has failed to keep a clear view on the importance of the person of Christ and what serving Christ as Supreme Lord means in terms of engaging rather than accommodating the culture. Instead the church has sought to contextualize the message of the Gospel in such a way that the message gets lost. What we have seen emerge in the accommodationist approach of Brian McLaren is merely the most recent ineffective attempt at contextualization. Wells would not say, nor does he say, that we ought not seek to make the Gospel heard in the language of the culture, but he does say that there may have been too much emphasis on contextualization at the expense of the Gospel clarity and divine power in proclamation as these three paragraphs show:

There is a long trail of contextualized theologies, written over the last half century, in which...cultural interests eclipse biblical norms, and the result has been the kind of compromise, trendiness, and manipulation, which ends up promoting worldly agendas, be they political, social, ideological, or personal, in place of biblical truth. This has been a sorry tale. And somewhere in the making of each of its works the fatal step was taken to allow the culture to say what God’s story should sound like rather than God telling His own story in His own way...There is much in the story of contextualization which proves how futile and empty it became precisely because it did not allow the biblical Word of God to summon it to its task and to judge the results.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 7.

When the church loses the Word of God it loses the very means by which God does His work. In its absence, therefore, a script is being written, however unwittingly, for the Church's undoing, not in one cataclysmic moment, but in a slow, inexorable slide made up of piece by tiny piece of daily dereliction.<sup>43</sup>

And yet, the history of the church shows that in every generation there are cultural challenges, in some places hostility against religion, overt persecution, difficulties of every kind, and yet generation after generation the Church has joyfully proclaimed the greatness of Christ and his humility in assuming our flesh, taking upon him our sin as if it were his own, and in conquering that sin also conquering both its consequence of death and the devil. The looming threats of aggressive religions, of hostile government powers, of tribes and nations bound in their opposition to Christ are no match for the power of God made known in the Gospel. Even in moments of persecution, from the dark prisons, this greatness of Christ has still been proclaimed... There is nothing in modern culture which diminishes our understanding of the greatness of Christ."<sup>44</sup>

Wells spends two chapters describing postmodernity and then an additional four chapters tracing the ways in which the church has failed to meet this new anti-Christian world view and how at the same time it is being co-opted by it. In his last chapter he charts a boldly optimistic course that looks to the past to guide the church in the future.

Wells' prose is a delight to read as he dips and soars through his analysis of modernity's morphing into postmodernity like a red-tailed hawk gliding effortlessly over the terrain below and in an instant swooping down to make the kill as he goes from the broad and general to a narrow and specific application. He uses a combination of the study of ideas (specifically Enlightenment ideas) and a description of the cultural processes that moved western society from the largely rural and pre-modern to an increasingly urban and modernized context. Some of this analysis was done previously in *No Place for Truth*.

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<sup>43</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 11.

In *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, he traces the drive for individual freedom that postmodernity inherited from modernity, that is, freedom in thought from outside influences or controls:

The Enlightenment's centerpiece Was freedom. Indeed, its *demand* was freedom: freedom from the past...God...and authority. It demanded freedom from every system of thought that would be resistant to its intellectual innovations. It resolutely opposed all ideas rooted in what was eternally fixed, and unchanging.<sup>45</sup>

This, says Wells, made every man a heretic—cut off from the community, its accepted thought, and the frameworks of past ideological formulations. The downside of this grand foray into freedom was a loss of the meaning of the person; “and meaning it should be remembered, has become the single most elusive and hauntingly unrequited pursuit in the modern period.”<sup>46</sup> When modern man cut himself loose from the encumbrances of the past—and even more importantly God—he was free to live out the oldest rebellion. He made himself, his ideas, his achievements, and his potentials to be his gods. Rather than becoming larger with his demanded freedom, his world became smaller to fit his gods. In the collapsed world of modernity's gods, psychology arose to become Lady Liberty leading individuals to confront the reality of the gnawing emptiness of the importance of the self. Psychology is not, and has proved not to be, able to deal with the truly deep, and high, and weighty matters of the human soul. Liberation psychotherapy may boldly proclaim healing powers and ultimate answers from within<sup>47</sup> but is little more than whistling in the dark.

The decadence, decay, and dissolution of the enlightenment view of life has spawned the despair, deep doubt, and cynicism of postmodernism. Postmodernity is

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<sup>45</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 49.

<sup>47</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 57.



“unbelief taking revenge on unbelief.”<sup>48</sup> The emancipation of modernity set man free to reject long held metanarratives, and

Without some kind of metanarrative to discipline private consciousness, meaning inevitably dies, “the triumph of wild and unregulated interpretation is assured, ‘stable meanings’ disintegrate...and the strong ‘assert their will to power without regard to such eternal values as truth, goodness, unity, and beauty.’ Universal narratives about the meaning of life are ‘shattered into micro-narratives of race, class and gender.’”<sup>49</sup>

The mood of postmodernity is both corrosive and destructive, and yet the rejection of Enlightenment values and ideas leave a void in our ability to resist the “siren song [that draws us] toward a place in which there are no worldviews, no truth, and no purpose.”<sup>50</sup> Wells explores each of these losses and then asks how a proper Biblical Christology will look in this new age where endless varieties of spiritualities and religions “jostle side by side.”<sup>51</sup>

The remainder of the book builds on and reflects on how Christ confronts a world that is spiritual, meaningless and de-centered. He shows that the market-driven, seeker sensitive, church-growth, self-centered, self-designed religious expressions that make up much of what passes for Evangelicalism today has failed. Wells says that it will only be possible to truly engage the new postmodern culture if the church can learn to understand its own unique missionary context, otherwise it will remain entangled in the disabling and blinding effects of its own sense of success. The church must disentangle itself from, and stand in bold relief against, the spirit(s) of the age in which it finds itself.

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<sup>48</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 63.

<sup>49</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 67, quoting Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Aesthetics: the Theological Sublimes.” *Christian Orthodoxy*, 201.

<sup>50</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 73.

<sup>51</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 90.

If it cannot or it does not, it will “continue to stagnate and contract despite all of its surface glitter and marketing savvy.”<sup>52</sup>

That the church finds itself in a missionary context is one of the main concerns of this paper. It is not only Wells who makes this observation but Loren Meade, Lesslie Newbigin, (who is surprisingly cited or mentioned only once in *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, although his shadow is seen throughout!) and the writers associated with the Gospel and Our Culture Network. David Wells' approach to the missionary context is to return to the original paragraphs<sup>53</sup> of *Above All Earthly Pow'rs* and to call the church to stop allowing itself to be stripped (or to stop stripping itself) of truth, doctrine, and discipline—“the very things which would make it distinctive in this culture.”<sup>54</sup> But even this is not enough. Taking a cue from, or at least agreeing with, the Emergent church thinkers like Brian McLaren (and as we shall see, Lesslie Newbigin), Wells calls the church to declare its message of truth, doctrine, and discipline with authenticity.<sup>55</sup> He says that

The postmodern reaction against Enlightenment dogma will not be met successfully simply by Christian proclamation... That proclamation must arise within a context of *authenticity*... The Church has been most influential in those moments when its contrition reached down deeply into its soul, when in its known weakness it cried out to God from the depths, when it sought to live by his truth and on his terms, when it sought to proclaim that truth in its world, when it was willing to pay the price of having that kind of truth when it was willing to demand of itself that it live by that truth, when it sought above else God in His grace and glory.<sup>56</sup>

Wells ends on a positive note, a joyous confidence that this missionary context in which the Church finds itself is a time for a renewed commitment to the truth in all its

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<sup>52</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 311.

<sup>53</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 11. “The missionary context of American culture is undergoing a massive shift from modernity to postmodernity, and with it a new set of challenges.”

<sup>54</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 313.

<sup>55</sup> Here again, as we shall see below, is an echo of Newbigin.

<sup>56</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 315-316.

glory, grace in all its power, and the fame of God to all the nations. This confidence and encouragement is what every biblical preacher needs on a regular basis. Wells is at his best in this book.

When David Wells published *Above All Earthly Pow'rs* in 2005, both he and his publisher called it the “fourth and final volume in the series that began with *No Place for Truth*.”<sup>57</sup> However, three years later we read him writing in the preface of his next book, *The Courage to be Protestant, Truth-lovers, Marketers, and the Emergents in the Postmodern World*, that what he had hoped would be a summary of his four previous books became a distillation of the five themes of those books (truth, God, self, Christ, and the Church), applying them in ways that would be more accessible and less taxing to his readers. The book does summarize, without unnecessary repetition of the books that preceded it. It also does us a service by going further than in his previous books looking at culture at large and the church’s failure to properly engage it. In this work Wells addresses Evangelicalism personally (as though it were an individual personality or monolithic entity) and shows how Evangelicalism must and can return to its roots<sup>58</sup> and again live with vibrant faithfulness to those roots with effectiveness and genuine God-centered metrics of success.

In the opening chapter Wells breaks contemporary Evangelicalism into what he refers to as three constituencies. One might think more in terms of sub-groupings, types, or expressions more than constituencies. What we are seeing is more along the lines of splintering or fragmenting. Wells admits as much when he says, “They are stepping stones away from the classical orthodoxy of the earlier evangelicals...toward a more

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<sup>57</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, Book jacket blurb.

<sup>58</sup> Wells uses ‘return’ in the same way as the Hebrews prophets, meaning “repent!”

liberalized Christianity [that will] in due course become full-blown liberal[ism].<sup>59</sup> The three splinters<sup>60</sup> (or shards of the iceberg to use his image) will continue to drift from historic Protestant orthodoxy because today's Evangelicalism has given up on the importance of doctrine, seeing it instead as an impediment to reaching new generations. Additionally, the desire to reach new generations is seen in the discovery of culture.<sup>61</sup> Not wanting to repeat the isolationist and fortress building mentality of the earlier generations of evangelicals (i.e. Fundamentalists) these splintering evangelicals use culture as a means to project a relevant message, which engages the audience where they are living. The downside is that when doctrine is gone, when truth is diluted or abandoned, the message cannot be relevant. It can only seek to put a religious veneer on the culture it is accommodating. When the church has nothing of import to say because it has reduced its message to what in media broadcasting is referred to LCD (Lowest Common Denominator) programming. It really has nothing to say at all. Not entirely, of course, but it vanishes as a player with a credible or authoritative voice in the arena of opinion making and culture engaging impact. What the church needs to remember is that it will influence its culture when it offers the culture what it cannot get anywhere else. The church is best when it distances itself from culture, refusing to be preoccupied with things that are this-worldly and being preoccupied with what is other-worldly. This alone will give the church character and a message worth telling and listening to.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and the Emergents in the World*. (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 2008), 2.

<sup>60</sup> These three splinters are reflected in the subtitle of this book, *Doctrinal Christians, Market Driven Protestants, and the Emergent Movement*.

<sup>61</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 224.

When the church does not see the necessity of the ancient truths, and the other-worldly nature of the life that that truth proclaims, it can only expect the result that we have seen in contemporary Evangelicalism. What we have seen is a new culturally hip and market-driven, consumer-oriented evangelicalism popularly known as the Seeker-Driven movement. Here the audience and its desires and felt-needs are king. Once the consumer experiences a Christianity that caters to her whims and his sense of need, the church can never keep up, never fulfill its promise to satisfy, never truly be successful in the terms of the market whose methods it is emulating.

What the Church, and Evangelicalism in particular, needs to do is to once again seek and speak truth, know God, put self where it should be under God, serve the risen and ruling Lord Christ, and be the church as it is defined by God's Word and not by the people of God's world. Wells is no Pollyanna, neither is he an Eeyore. He knows the lay of the land—but more importantly, eternally more importantly, he knows the foundation that needs to be under that land if God's Church is to be obediently and faithfully triumphant and not merely successful.

Wells calls the Church to proclaim the message of God with clarity, boldness, and confidence. He answers his question, “does this preach?” by reminding the reader that the emptiness and confusion and dismay that is so much a part of modern culture will not and cannot be met with accommodation, marketing, symbols or images. The church must preach, nothing “can substitute for the fact that the church has to *proclaim* the truth about Christ, that it cannot do so without using words, that words are the tools for expressing our thoughts, and that our thoughts must correspond to the reality of what has been done

in Christ.”<sup>63</sup> It is only the preaching of the true Gospel that will allow people to move from the shallowness of their own emptiness to the deep wells of satisfaction that are found in Christ alone.

Christendom may be gone and we may be living in a post-everything world, but this reality actually helps the church in this Age of Mission. Wells asks, does not the Bible tell us this present world is dead?<sup>64</sup> Then why do we hesitate to bring it the life source of the resurrection? It will only be by returning to the roots of the Reformation and its commitment to the five *Solas* that the Church can preach a message of new life that will transcend every age and every culture and every counterfeit claimant to the thrones of our lives.

### **Lesslie Newbigin**

It may seem that an inordinate amount of space has been given to the first two authors in this review when there are so many other works that have been written on these themes. The goal has been to show the contrast between two very influential authors and thinkers who have come at the same materials from different starting points and have therefore ended at different places as well. What is surprising to this writer is the negligible place that has been given by both McLaren and Wells to the man who in many ways is truly the foundation of contemporary thinking on issues of culture, contextualization, relevancy of speech and communication, and the absolute necessity for the church and its preachers to remember that we are also evangelists, always heralds of the Kingdom, always subservient to the Great Commission of Our Lord, and always

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<sup>63</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 203.

<sup>64</sup> Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 195.

living in the midst of a vast and largely unreached mission field. That man is Bishop Lesslie Newbigin.

Bishop Newbigin returned to the United Kingdom after what he describes as a lifetime serving as a foreign missionary in India (thirty-six years<sup>65</sup>) only to continue as a college teacher, church statesman, author (17 books and 50 articles *before* his retirement and then in his most productive period in his mid-seventies the world saw the publication of 15 books and over 150 articles),<sup>66</sup> and at age 72 to begin a seven-year pastorate in an inner-city church in Birmingham. Although it is understandable that he might be held suspect by more conservative evangelicals for his deeply committed ecumenism and long-time involvement in the World Council of churches. Newbigin is today a force to be reckoned with for all and any who wish to speak about the mission of the Church in this Age of Mission whether one names it post-Christendom, Post-Christianity, Post-Modernity or “Our Time.”<sup>67</sup> It is really quite amazing to see the outflow of current missiological and ecclesiological literature that pushes the ideas of contextualization and the missional call and nature of the Church today as though these are new and fresh ideas and then to read Newbigin writing in 1963,

The western world has had to be recognized once again as a mission field, and the churches have been compelled in a new way to define their nature and mission as parts of a divine society distinct from the wider society of nations in which they live, and all these factors have contributed to developments in the field of theology in the direction of a missionary understanding of the nature of the Church itself. The truth that the Church is itself something sent into the world, the continuation of Christ’s mission

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<sup>65</sup> Leslie Newbigin, *The Cultural Captivity of Western Christianity as a Challenge to the Missionary Church*, 66-79; *A Word in Season, Perspectives on Christian World Missions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 67.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Weston, compiler and introduction, Lesslie Newbigin, *Missionary Theologian: A Reader*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), viii, 13.

<sup>67</sup> “Our Time” is the designation that David Wells gives to the current transition period between Modernity and whatever the age will be called that follows it in *No place for Truth*, and carries it through all five of the books reviewed above.

from the Father, something which is not so much as an institution as an expedition sent to the ends of the earth in Christ's Name, has been grasped with new vividness.<sup>68</sup>

The vast amount of Newbigin material available is beyond the scope of this paper. However, three primary works have been selected for review since they seem to address the issues of contextulization in relation to missional biblical preaching that is the focus of this paper. *Foolishness to the Greeks*, *The Gospel and Western Culture*, *The Gospel in Pluralistic Society*,<sup>69</sup> and *A Word in Season*<sup>70</sup> lay out Bishop Newbigin's perspectives on the challenges that culture, science, and political structures present to the task of proclaiming the biblical message in the Post-Enlightenment world.

The question being answered in *Foolishness to the Greeks* is "what would be involved in a missionary encounter between the Gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living what we call 'modern Western Culture'?"<sup>71</sup> Newbigin says this is a question that was raised by Richard Niebuhr in 1951, in *Christ and Culture*.<sup>72</sup> However, in Newbigin's opinion the question had not in his day been asked by theologians with experience on a cultural frontier seeking to transmit the Gospel from one culture to another—especially a culture that is radically different than the missionary's culture of origin. As one having a first time encounter with this question, the present writer was

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<sup>68</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1963), 11-12.

<sup>69</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986); *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>70</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season, Perspectives on Christian World Missions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>71</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1.

<sup>72</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1951; paperback edition, New York: Harper & Row Torch Books, 1956). Niebuhr asked how Christ's followers understand their own place in the world described five options for understanding Christ's (and the church's) engagement with culture as "against," "of," and "above" culture, as well as Christ "transforming" culture, and Christ in "paradoxical" relation to it. A popular modernization of Niebuhr's work is Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope, A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) and an updated look at Niebuhr from a Reformed and Evangelical position is found in Donald A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).



fascinated to see Newbigin's change of focus from the necessity of a cultural contextualization of the message to a call for the awareness that every announcement of the Gospel is culturally conditioned and can easily mean radically different things to preacher and to the hearer. Radically different because both persons are translating the words and concepts of the Gospel message unaware that they are doing so through a rigid and powerful cultural grid. Neglecting this reality is disastrous to the transmission process in every case, but particularly so when the preacher ignores the pervasiveness of modern Western (post-Enlightenment, technological, global) culture. "Moreover this neglect is more serious because it is this culture that, more than almost any other, is proving resistant to the Gospel." Even though the Church is seeing encouraging and rapid growth ("steady and spectacular") in areas of Asia, Africa and Oceania, it is shrinking and the Gospel proclamation appears to fall on deaf ears in areas dominated by modern Western culture."<sup>73</sup>

After Newbigin defines culture and the Gospel in *Foolishness to the Greeks*, he makes the statement that the Gospel can never be culture-free, meaning that the Gospel is always announced in culturally-tinged concepts. However, at the same time the Gospel comes to call culture(s) into questions. Newbigin spends the rest of the book pursuing the following goals, each one of which is addressed with a full chapter treatment:

1. To look in general at issues raised by cross-cultural communications of the Gospel.
2. To examine the essential features of our modern western culture, including signs of its present disintegration.
3. To face the crucial question of how biblical authority can be a reality for those who are shaped by Modern Western Culture.
4. To ask what would be involved in the encounter of the Gospel with our culture with respect to the intellectual core of our culture, which is science.

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<sup>73</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 3.

5. To ask the same question with respect to our politics, and
6. To inquire about the task of the church in bringing about this encounter.<sup>74</sup>

Newbigin writes of the necessity of knowing the language of Scripture, one's own heart language, the culturally conditioned heart language of the receptor, and the awareness of correct communication methods. At the same time he is careful to point out that the conversation of individuals in the receptor culture will never be a result of these things alone but will only come through the mysterious and powerful work of God's Spirit. It is a supernatural miracle:

[T]he radical conversion of the heart, the U-turn of the mind which the New Testament calls *metanoia* can never be the achievement of any human persuasion, however eloquent...can never be the calculable results of correct communication methods...it can only be the work of God. It is this end, the end of a true Biblical conversion that is the end and the goal of all Gospel communication.<sup>75</sup>

This is refreshing in a day when steps, forms, processes, and methods are given almost inspired, if not canonical, status when they are presented to the aspiring preacher. Every new book on preaching methodology seems to come with the claim that it is the silver bullet that will put to death poor preaching.

For anyone seeking to preach the Gospel message in a unfamiliar culturally conditioned setting (and every encounter will have more culturally conditioning than perhaps we realize in the rapidly changing and fragmented culture that we have been describing as post-enlightenment, post-Christian and postmodern), Newbigin uses for an illustration the experience of a missionary raised and immersed in one culture who seeks to communicate the Gospel among a people of another culture whose *world has been shaped by a vision of the totality of things quite different from that of the Bible. He must*

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<sup>74</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 9.

*struggle to master the language.*"<sup>76</sup> The reader is called to note that learning the language is a struggle, it is work, we must be willing to do the hard work involved in order to be effective communicators into our new culture. The preacher needs to immerse himself in the "talk" of the culture wherever it is found: books, TV, popular music, conversation. The point is that immersion is necessary. Often the preacher will discover that there are no exact equivalents between Scriptural concepts and words within a culture and its language. "All the words in any language derive their meaning in the minds of those who use them, from a whole world of experience...so...he has to render the message the best he can, drawing as fully as he can upon the tradition of the people to whom he speaks."<sup>77</sup>

There are two dangers for the communicator. Either he will use the language as a foreigner, using the words without a proper understanding of their *meaning and nuances*, so that "...his message is heard as the babblings of a man who really has nothing to say,"<sup>78</sup> or he will become so familiar with the words that he sounds like another moralist coming out of the culture.<sup>79</sup> Newbigin warns us that in the attempt to be relevant, one may fall into syncretism, which is the danger that we saw in McLaren and his fellow Emergents. At the same time by making the effort to avoid syncretism one may become irrelevant. Newbigin is always faithful to return to subservience to the power of God and

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<sup>76</sup> Emphasis mine. This is the vision I have for preaching. We speak into a culture as though we understand it and we use words that we think are clear to our audience. But often these words have either no meaning or completely different meanings for the audience than the ones we think we are communicating. The language of the receptor must be known.

<sup>77</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 10.

<sup>79</sup> There seems to be another danger as well. It is the danger of using cultural *patois* and slang that is not one's own and looking quite foolish to the listener.

to say that in the providence of God, “a word spoken comes with the kind of power of the word that was spoken to Saul on the road to Damascus.”<sup>80</sup>

After describing modern Western culture’s allegiance to the scientific method and the subsequent division between facts and faith which pushes faith, morals and values into the sphere of the private and publically unacceptable and irrelevant, the diminishment of the authority of the Biblical Word in this scientific society, the capitulation of the church to the separation of church and state, Newbigin spends the pages of his last chapter warmly and passionately calling the church to be the church.

In this final chapter, Newbigin calls for a new way of engaging the culture that does not allow us to return to a synthesis between church and culture that became Christendom. Nor can we simply allow the Church become a hiding place and purveyor of privatized, spiritual panaceas that allow Christians to “enjoy a rewarding religious security but are not required to challenge the ideology that rules the public life of nations.”<sup>81</sup> The Church is to proclaim the true kingship of Jesus Christ over every aspect of human life and institutions, even going so far as to imitate the early church and to accept the responsibility of seeking to shape public life with a vision of the Incarnate Lord, whose resurrection did not merely reverse death but declared victory over the powers of this world and its systems. Newbigin’s vision for the proclamation of the Gospel includes the rightness of seeking to establish a new culture, with laws consonant with biblical teaching, and to place rulers and leaders under the “explicit obligations of Christian discipleship.”<sup>82</sup> Contrary to the laments of John Howard Yoder and his

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<sup>80</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 124.

<sup>82</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 129.

disciples regarding the dilution of true Christianity that came as a result of what they call Constantinian Christendom, Newbigin says that if the early church had reneged on these responsibilities, it would have been an act of apostasy and an abandonment of the Gospel!<sup>83</sup>

Newbigin continues to explore the themes of contemporary/modern Western Culture in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*.<sup>84</sup> Recognizing that the West is within the thrall of pluralism does not mean that the church must capitulate to and be satisfied with this state of being. However, in order to combat this leviathan of pluralism, both its nature and contributing causes must be understood. Newbigin's goal is to examine the perception that a pluralistic society, one in which there is not an officially approved pattern of belief or conduct, is a good or desirable state. It is further perceived that modern society ought to be one that is not controlled by any dogma whatsoever. The Enlightenment thinkers who provided the foundations for a pluralistic society claimed and taught that every dogmatic claimant to the throne of human belief systems needs to be submitted to critical, even skeptical examination.<sup>85</sup> In our present Western pluralism, only that which can stand up to the proofs of the scientific method is allowed to be stated, or taught, as "fact." If one promotes non-facts (those beliefs and morals and values which do not bow to the rigors of Baconian proofs) with the confidence that they are true and binding, that one is seen as naïve at best, but more likely as arrogant. Christianity and its claims and moral stipulations are then placed in the realm of non-fact or dogma. Placed here they are thereby stripped of their authority in the modern world and are

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<sup>83</sup> For a summary of Yoder's thesis concerning Constantinian Christendom see Chapter One of this paper. For a recent and contrasting view of see Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine, the Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>85</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 3.

instead relegated to the realm of the private personal sphere and given exactly the same designation on non-status as every other religious dogma and belief statement.

Christianity does not allow for this side-track shunting. It declares with boldness that it is truth, it is fact, it is to be accepted and believed.

When the unbounded confidence in human reason (beginning with Renaissance Humanism) collided with the unprincipled corruptions of the late medieval church, resulting in the wars of religion that were the unhappy spawn of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Enlightenment Humanism took the main stage. What we have been given as a result of nearly 400 years of growing Enlightenment thinking and hubris is a society that is pluralistic in every area *except* in realm of fact *vis a vis* faith.<sup>86</sup> One of the problems that Newbigin raises is that the scientific method is built on the foundation of tradition and traditionally held dogmas. It has been accepted and asserted that the universe is a reasonable and predictable thing that can be tested and probed and quantified. Following Michael Polyani who said, “the authority of science is essentially traditional,”<sup>87</sup> Newbigin says every scientist, from the student to the explorer on the frontier of research, accepts the authority of tradition in order to gain a grasp on the truth. Tradition is accepted until one is able to arrive at the point where he can say, “I see this now for myself.”<sup>88</sup> This is what the Christian believer must do as well—accept the tradition and then by exploration internalize it and make it a personal possession. It is not fair for the scientist to demand one set of precondition for the faith-believer (verifiable

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<sup>86</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 27.

<sup>87</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 47, quoting Michael Polyani, *Knowing and Being, Essays by Michael Polyani*, Marjorie Grene, editor, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 66.

<sup>88</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 48.

facts only) and another for the scientific researcher (the tradition of the science that has preceded).

Newbigin considers and exposes the myths that are inherent in a pluralistic evaluation of revelation, the authority of Scripture, the centrality and uniqueness of Christ, world religions, and finally what he calls the myth of secular society. In this chapter he challenges the conventional wisdom that secularization is both inevitable and a good thing for society. Evidence is to the contrary. The Church is not ceasing to exist. It endures, and in many places it both endures and is flourishing in spite of the false gods of culture and society. If the secular society is so strong and good, why then have we seen an “unprecedented crop of new religions” and a growing longing for and experimentation with the spiritual side of life?<sup>89</sup> Picking up the theme seen in the final pages of *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Newbigin again stresses the importance of a continuing proclamation of the Gospel—a call to personal, individual salvation and discipleship. But the Gospel call, the affirmation of Christianity, cannot be allowed to stop at the personal and private. “It cannot mean that the Church is seen as a voluntary society of individuals who have decided to follow Jesus in their personal lives, a society which does not challenge the assumptions which govern the worlds of politics, economics, education, and culture.”<sup>90</sup>

In order for the Church and for individual Christians to make this call to whole-life integration of the Gospel on society, there must be a boldness in being able to say, “I call you to this life in the name of Jesus.” This is the authority and confidence of the

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<sup>89</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 220.

<sup>90</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 220.

Gospel.<sup>91</sup> This authority is often undercut when the proclamation is faced with the charge of arrogance. Truth proclamations, especially exclusivistic religious claims sound arrogant in the pluralistic world, where truth is not one but many or all. One wrong response by the preacher to a charge of arrogance is to become frightened and timid, which keeps the gospel from being told. Newbigin suggests that a second wrong response to this charge is anxiety, a fear that if one is not cautious with the proclamation the Church will lose its place of favor and acceptance and support in the society and collapse. The proper attitude for the preacher is one of confidence in the revelation, the experience, the plausibility, and the power of the Gospel to do what it says it will do. Newbigin strikes the chord again for authenticity in the Christian community that makes the Gospel proclamation. Authenticity builds not only confidence but also credibility and gives leverage to the proclamation. At the same time, there must be humility in this confidence, since it always God who reveals, God who changes, God who defines plausibility, and God who acts according to His own promise and Word.<sup>92</sup> In too many cases the Church, in the proper desire to protect orthodoxy and to ward off heresies, has shown too little of love, grace and mercy to the world to whom it is sent to bring the good news.

For readers not wanting to read Newbigin in his entirety, there are at least two other ways to benefit from his thinking and writing. In 1994, William B. Eerdmans publishing Company compiled *A Word in Season, Perspectives on Christian World*

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<sup>91</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 242-244.



*Missions*,<sup>93</sup> and in 2006, released *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian, A Reader*.<sup>94</sup>

The first of these is a collection of previously unpublished papers and articles spanning nearly thirty-five years. Some of these articles are summaries of his longer works,<sup>95</sup> others anticipate larger works that followed,<sup>96</sup> and still others are applications of his ideas in his personal experience in local settings.<sup>97</sup> The second book is a collection of selections and excerpts from Newbigin's entire writing career arranged thematically with introductory remarks by the editor. It is fascinating to see both the development of Newbigin's thinking in some areas and the remarkable consistency of his thinking in others.

### **The Gospel and Our Culture Network**

The Gospel and Our Culture Network has published at least six full-length books building on Newbigin's work. The first of these was *The Church Between Gospel & Culture, The Emerging Mission in North America*.<sup>98</sup> The twenty-seven articles in the first book lay a groundwork for Newbigin's thinking and writing in four major categories. The book hit this reviewer like a bombshell when it was first read. It opens the door to the understanding of North America as a mission field, the necessity of translating the

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<sup>93</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season, Perspectives on Christian World Missions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1994).

<sup>94</sup> Paul Weston, *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian, A Reader*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>95</sup> Weston, editor, *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian, A Reader* "By What Authority," 80-89 summarizes *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*.

<sup>96</sup> Weston, ed., *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian, A Reader*, "Our Missionary Responsibility in the Crisis of Western Culture" Paul Weston, *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian, A Reader* 98-112 spans the material between *Foolishness to the Greeks* and *The Gospel in Pluralistic Society*.

<sup>97</sup> Weston, ed., *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian, A Reader* "Mission in a Modern City," 33-39 and "The Pastor's opportunities: Evangelism in the City, 40-47.

<sup>98</sup> George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, editors, *The Church Between Gospel & Culture: The Emerging Church in America*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

Gospel into appropriate and relevant cultural terms,<sup>99</sup> and the importance of seeing the church as a missional force, organizing its structures and leadership accordingly. The application for preaching is primarily implicit. James V. Brownson speaks to preaching issues in “The Truth in Love,”<sup>100</sup> but even in this chapter the emphasis is more weighted towards hermeneutics than homiletics. Answering how we are to speak the truth in love as cross-cultural, missional heralds, this author says that a hermeneutic of diversity, that is, one that recognized the variegated and multi-cultural diversity of those who have come, and are coming to the text, will yield a variety of interpretations and insights. These interpretations should be allowed to engage in ongoing dialog with one another in order to loving and respectfully come to wider and deeper understandings of the text and the God whose story and glory is their subject. Brownson balances this hermeneutic of diversity with the hermeneutic of coherence” which is meant to allow us to speak the truth in a world, not only of culture diversity, but one of relativism and plurality. If only the former hermeneutic is utilized, “such a posture could easily dissolve into an infinite number of diverse and conflicting readings of the Bible.”<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately, in this reviewer’s mind, Brownson’s use of coherence in the truth conversation is not meant to define a theory of truth, but rather a desire for commonality in the ways that interpreters come to the text. Whereas coherence might mean to some that the story of Scripture coheres and follows one theme from beginning to end, Brownson tells us it is possible for the interpreter to come to Scripture and do exegesis “without recognizing or attributing

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<sup>99</sup> *Contextualization* was a familiar concept but the applications in this book seemed to be much more practical and user-friendly at the local church and pastoral/preaching level.

<sup>100</sup> Hunsberger and Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel & Culture* (1996), 228-259.

<sup>101</sup> Hunsberger and Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel & Culture*, 239.

any ‘wholeness’ to the New Testament canon in its entirety.”<sup>102</sup> The coherence that Brownson seeks comes from an understanding of the Gospel. But even here his journey from the work/concept Gospel to his final definition is tortuous and made unnecessarily complicated by revisiting discussions of historical contexts, genre, literary context, and the use of tradition in the interpretive task. This is material that seems to be fairly basic to any understanding of exegesis and interpretation and the resulting definition of the Gospel is not much different than many others. Brownson says that the Gospel is the conviction that in the “life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has revealed the completion of His saving purpose for the world, to be received by faith.”<sup>103</sup> Brownson is never clear about his definition of truth, in its universal and absolute form or in its localized “true-for-me” form. He ends by saying that the task of the preacher is to show that the truth is true not only for the speaker but that it has “cosmic significance”<sup>104</sup> for the hearer as well. The task of the preacher is to make the true-for-me-truth true for the listener. One wishes that Brownson had given more concrete advice for making this happen, especially since he offers no definition for the truth he seeks to make known.

The books that follow in the Gospel and Our Culture series<sup>105</sup> continue to apply Newbigin’s thought by focusing on the missional call to the church without giving any explicit emphasis on preaching. All of the work of the GOCN is summarized in

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<sup>102</sup> Hunsberger and Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel & Culture*, 240.

<sup>103</sup> Hunsberger and Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel & Culture*, 253.

<sup>104</sup> Hunsberger and Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel & Culture*, 258.

<sup>105</sup> Darrel L. Guder, editor, *Missional Church, A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1998); Darrel L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 2000), Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church, A community Created by the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), Lois Y. Barrett, editor, *Treasure in Jars of Clay, Patterns for Missional Faithfulness*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 2004), Craig Van Gelder, foreword by Alan Roxburgh, *The Ministry of the Missional Church, A Community Led by the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker books, 2007).

*StormFront: The Good News of God.*<sup>106</sup> Building on earlier books in the series, the authors present the conclusion that the Church's witness must be that which declares the arrival of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. Preaching that serves the mission of God will confront the powers of the seen and unseen worlds.<sup>107</sup> Preaching is to call believers to resist these powers in the world as representatives of God who has called them to Himself. The book offers four ways that we can practice a responsible witness and mission: Analysis (discerning of spirits), Intercession (work on behalf of the poor and oppressed), Prophecy, and Imagination. Once again the emphasis does not cover homiletic issues, but remains important for background to this paper, especially in light of the growing emphasis on the missional aspects of the church being given by leaders and thinkers in the Emerging/Emergent church movements.

## **Preaching**

Preaching books fall into several sub-groups such as: homiletic texts, "How to reach a specific audience," examples from the lives of great preachers, and specialized preaching such as narrative, inductive, or ethnic-based. There are even books telling listeners how to listen to sermons! This review will be limited to an overview of books read from the first three categories. It is meant to be a light overview since these books have been referenced in the preceding chapter.

General Preaching: The most helpful authors and books in this subset for the purposes of this writer and paper are Haddon Robinson,<sup>108</sup> John Piper,<sup>109</sup> D. Martyn

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<sup>106</sup> Ingrace T. Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, Charles C. West, James V. Brownson, Edmore with a foreword by George R. Hnsberger, *StormFront: The GoodNew of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 2003).

<sup>107</sup> This theme is also discussed in Newbiggin's *Gospel and Pluralistic Society*, pp. 198-210.

<sup>108</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980).

<sup>109</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker. 1990).

Lloyd-Jones,<sup>110</sup> John R. W. Stott,<sup>111</sup> Charles Kraft,<sup>112</sup> and Bryan Chappel.<sup>113</sup> Robinson's Big Idea concept for preaching is used every week by this preacher. The Big Idea discipline is imperative for keeping the focus of the sermon on track, especially in a day when we are being told how limited our audience's attention span is! Lloyd-Jones and Stott are both practical hands-on generalist texts providing both an excellent foundation for preaching and the practical instruction and application for every aspect of the task. Some will find Lloyd-Jones a bit dated but no one will fault his high view of preaching.<sup>114</sup> Stott's gift is in making the more technical hermeneutical discussions accessible and usable. Stott shows the preacher is a bridge between the ancient world of the Bible and the modern (postmodern!) world of today's listener and puts Gadamer *et. al.* in the hands of every preacher. John Piper puts the goal and aim of preaching exactly where it should be. When *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* was written in 1988, seasoned and would-be-preachers were being presented with book after book that approached preaching from the audience-driven, success-oriented perspective of the Church Growth practitioners.<sup>115</sup> Piper puts God and His glory at the center of preaching where it must be. Equally important is Chapel's emphasis in preaching that make Christ and redemption the center of our weekly task. Chappel calls on the preacher to stay away

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<sup>110</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972).

<sup>111</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds, the Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>112</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll, New York, 1991 (first edition Nashville: Abingdon Books, 1983) While not purely a preaching text this is still quite helpful in understanding the dynamics of communication theory specifically applied to preaching.

<sup>113</sup> Bryan Chapel, *Christ Centered Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994).

<sup>114</sup> In 2012, Zondervan published the fortieth anniversary edition of Lloyd-Jones with essays by several contemporary preachers extolling his impact.

<sup>115</sup> Well documented by David Wells in *no Place for Truth and Courage to be Protestant*, see also Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe, Haddon Robinson, *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1989).

from moralistic preaching and to always make grace, not works, both the sermon's focus and its application.

The most helpful book for this paper, however, is *Inspired Preaching* by C. Richard Wells and A. Boyd Luter.<sup>116</sup> This book takes Scripture seriously and uses the text to show what preaching is in the New Testament. The authors of this book analyze preaching in the New Testament beginning with the preaching of Jesus in the Gospels and working through Acts and the Epistles. Each example of preaching, and every speech, receives careful attention. Focus is not only given to the context and structure, but also the personality of the Apostolic preacher and tackles the important issues of inspiration in biblical preaching and the use of the Old Testament in New Testament preaching exegesis. The authors not only delineate preaching of Scripture, they also give attention to its rhetorical constructions. This book provides a framework for discussing preaching from the examples of Scripture—rather than according to the audience, communication theory, or varieties of innovative methodology. This book has been used as a springboard to seeing the elements of apostolic preaching as paradigms for all preaching in any missional setting that are listed and discussed in chapter two of this paper.

Audience Specific Preaching: Because this paper began as a study of how to preach to postmoderns, the preaching books first read were *Confessing Jesus Christ, Preaching in a Postmodern World*,<sup>117</sup> *Theology for Preaching, Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of*

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<sup>116</sup> Wells, Richard C. and A. Boyd Luter, *Inspired Preaching, A Survey of Preaching Found in the New Testament*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003).

<sup>117</sup> Allen, Ronald J., Barbara Shires Blaisdell and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching, Authority, Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1977).

*God in a Postmodern Ethos*,<sup>118</sup> and *Preaching to a Postmodern World, A Guide for Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners*.<sup>119</sup>

In *Confessing Jesus Christ*, David J. Lose offers a careful and in-depth survey of philosophical material, communication theory and theological integration, delivering a rationale for preaching in the current postmodern world. He uses the term ‘confession’ as a time-honored concept but expands its use to include conversation between the preacher, tradition, the canon of Scripture and the audience. Lose is making a case that postmodernity offers the preacher and the listener more, not less, freedom to be true to the text and the task of preaching than modernity has given. This freedom comes from the ambiguities of a postmodern approach to truth and authority, not from an attitude of bowing before them.

In *Theology for Preaching*, Allen, et. al. give us an example of what homiletic theory and methodology look like when the Scripture is not a sure foundation. The authors of this book seek to show how one can be postmodern in preaching to postmoderns. It would seem that this book would be very unsatisfying to an evangelical audience—or even to anyone who is looking for certainty as a preacher.

*Preaching to Postmoderns*, stands squarely in the evangelical tradition and theology. Johnston gives a succinct and manageable overview of postmodernity and how it contrasts with modernity. He also shows how the concerns of postmodernity may be considered, met and used in proclaiming the Gospel message. This book includes an

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<sup>118</sup> David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ, Preaching to a Postmodern World, A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. 2001).

<sup>119</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World, A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001).

extensive bibliography but makes no appeal to Scripture in determining the methodology of preaching.

Examples of Preaching from the Lives of Great Preachers: This is an enjoyable and eye-opening category of homiletical study. The first book<sup>120</sup> read in this category was Fred W. Meuser's *Luther the Preacher*.<sup>121</sup> Originally a set of lectures given to preachers and seminarians, this short book covers Luther's passion for preaching, his style of preaching and his gift for preaching. In the chapter on passion Meuser brings Luther into every preacher's study and pulpit with his focus on the eschatological conflict of preaching. Luther believed that preaching is a "wondrous, dangerous and passionate affair"<sup>122</sup> because it really is God Almighty speaking through the preacher. Beyond that truth, however, is the reality that in every in every sermon there is a cosmic conflict between God and Satan. The sermon is not to be preached as though it is a lecture in a classroom, it is to be preached as though the sermon is a battlefield. There will be teaching in every true sermon, but that teaching cannot stand alone. There must be exhortation. Preaching for Luther is instruction with exhortation. Because this battle is taking place with the preacher as the very mouthpiece of God, the preacher is never to apologize for a sermon or to wish he had done better. It is God who is battling on his own behalf! "He preached as though every sermon...was a battle for the souls of the

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<sup>120</sup> Additional books in this category read include: Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The First Forty Years 1899-1939*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), C. H., Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry, Addresses to Ministers and Students*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960 paperback edition, 1972, first published, 1900), T H L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), Lester De Koester, *Light in the Coty, Calvin's Preaching, Source of Light and Liberty*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2007).

<sup>121</sup> Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg, 1983).

<sup>122</sup> Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 25.



people. Preaching was “an apocalyptic event that set the doors of heaven and hell in motion, a part of the actual conflict between the Lord and Satan. It is the most dangerous task in the world...”<sup>123</sup> Preachers who believe and remember this will be far less sure of the weapons of this world and far more concerned about the panoply of heaven. It is unfortunate that this book is so difficult to obtain; it is a jewel.

In *Kindled Fire*,<sup>124</sup> Zack Eswine surprised me by laying a foundation for the importance of Spurgeon’s preaching. Eswine shows the similarities between Spurgeon’s day and ours and the difficulty preachers had even then appealing to, and keeping, their audience’s attention. Eswine breaks the book into three sections that depend on both Spurgeon’s sermons and lectures to students to discuss the preacher’s story, practice, and power. The fact that Eswine shows these similarities between past and present makes this book far more than a mere overview of a preacher from the past. It makes the manner that Spurgeon prepared, prayed, and preached applicable to our own day.

The favorite book in this category is *Princeton Preaching*.<sup>125</sup> James Garretson has pored over sermons, archived lecture notes, and biographical materials to bring us a picture of a preacher, theologian, and pastor who stood as a giant during his own life and casts a long shadow even today. Garretson’s chapters on the personal preparation of the preacher and attention to the call of the preacher are well worth study by budding preachers and the judicatories that call and affirm them. Preaching style and delivery are considered in the chapter titled “The Matter of Preaching.”<sup>126</sup> Alexander’s teaching and

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<sup>123</sup> Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 26. See Appendix Three “Preaching as Spiritual Warfare”.

<sup>124</sup> Zack Eswine, *Kindled Fire, How the Methods of C. H. Spurgeon Can Help Your Preaching*, (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2006).

<sup>125</sup> James M. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching, Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005).

<sup>126</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 134-176.

thinking on revelation, inspiration, apologetics, and controversy continues to be helpful today and transcend the divide between modernity and postmodernity. Alexander anticipated Edward Clowney and Stanley Greidanus as he taught on the centrality of redemption in preaching and preaching Christ from the Old Testament<sup>127</sup> and that of Bryan Chappel, Michael Horton,<sup>128</sup> and Jerry Bridges,<sup>129</sup> who encourage the contemporary preacher to keep grace at the forefront of all Biblical preaching. Most helpful for the preacher seeking to preach Biblically in an Age of Mission is the material on preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. This subject is addressed more fully in Appendix Four.

### **Other**

Because this writer's opinion is that the work of Francis Schaeffer is fundamental to the understanding of how to engage contemporary people with the Gospel by using the analysis of art, music, philosophy, and literature, most of his books have been reread for this paper. Thinking there is ample evaluation of that work in many other places there will be none here.

Materials from a workshop by Dr. Timothy Keller at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in May, 2006, are also used. Keller shows how we must keep Christ and His presence in our life central to our preaching, while remaining culturally fluent. He, too, shares the Christo-centric emphasis of Greidanus and Clowney.

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<sup>127</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 166.

<sup>128</sup> Michael Horton, *The Gospel Driven Life: Being Good News People in Bad News World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009).

<sup>129</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Gospel for Real Life*, (Colorado Springs: NavBooks Press, 2002).

## Summary

This review seeks to give a highlight to some of the reading that was done to prepare the writer for this paper. As the previous chapter shows, there is a manner and model of Biblical Missional preaching that can be derived from the Book of Acts. Cultural analysis, the proven methodologies of careful homiletical thinking, the experience of the great preachers of the past, and the clear example of the Apostles are all woven together to present this model.

Solomon was correct about the making of books. There are too many to read and the ones that are read are too many to properly review. However, much was learned in the process. Another aphorism from Solomon is again proved, "There is nothing new under the sun." Authors are seldom consistently creative, fresh, or insightful. They are seldom free from repetition. They often borrow from others without proper credit being given. However, the rewards of much and wide reading are great. Every book opened the door to several more, and coming to a stopping place is quite difficult. The bibliography should be consulted for a full listing of all books used for this thesis-project.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHING THE CONCEPTS OF BIBLICAL PREACHING IN AN AGE OF MISSION**

### **Chapter Overview**

In this chapter we present an outline for teaching the material covered in Chapter Two of this thesis-project. The teaching material is broken into four sections designed to be taught within seventy-five to ninety minutes each. The may choose to extend the time-frame to fit specifics teaching settings. After presenting an overview of the four blocks (written to the student) each of the four blocks will be expanded for the instructor's use.

### **Block I: Introduction Biblical and Missional Preaching**

Introduction: Biblical preaching is always an act of heralding good news to those who need to hear it. Unless we keep this proclamational aspect of preaching at the forefront of our thinking and preparation we soon lose sight of the very nature of preaching.

Importance: We are always preaching, or should be preaching, as though we are on the frontiers of the mission field. If we are not preaching in this way we will face two equally dangerous risks. The first is that we will be merely talking to ourselves, preaching to the choir. We will have no missional edge, compassion, or patience. We will lose both the passion and power of the evangel. The second risk is that we will become moralistic preachers sailing very close to the wind of a self-works and self-righteous sanctification with all of the priggishness that this moralism always generates.

Outcomes: By the end of this session you will be able to (1) define biblical preaching, (2) explain the missional nature of biblical preaching, and (3) list the elements necessary for biblical missional preaching derived from the sermons recorded in the book of Acts.

Objectives: You will be able to differentiate between non-biblical preaching and biblical preaching. You will be able to evaluate preaching by identifying the inclusion of the missional elements from the Book of Acts.

## **Block II: Framework for Biblical/Missional Preaching**

Introduction: In this section we will see the interplay of components of the Biblical Sermon bringing together the foundation of God and His Word, the message to be proclaimed, the preacher as one using natural faculties as well as depending on the call and presence of the Holy Spirit, and awareness of the audience. The goal is to preach for the glory of God and the good of the individual audience hearer.

Importance: The sermon is to be seen as a complete structure with a foundation, four walls, and a roof. If either the foundation or the walls are missing or unstable the roof will collapse. The sermon will not achieve the twin goals of bringing glory to God or good to the people who hear. It is possible to present a discourse on the Scripture that has both passion and application and miss the mark of true Biblical and Missional preaching.

Outcomes: By the end of the session you will be able to: (1) Name the four foundations for Biblical and Missional preaching, (2) See the Gospel as a two-fold message of grace in salvation and sanctification, (3) Identify the external and internal components that make for bold, clear, and confident preaching, (4) name the two

overarching goals in preaching: God's Glory and the Eternal Good of the Hearer.

The sermon structure is presented as a building with a foundation, four walls, and a roof.

Objectives: You will be able to produce a process for keeping the components of Biblical preaching in view as you prepare to preach. You will have tools for evaluating the sermons according the Biblical/Missional grid.

### **Block III: Building the Framework** (Putting together the pieces)

Introduction: In this section we go through the steps of building the sermon so that it will reflect the missional aspects and fulfill the goals of the Biblical preaching seen in the Book of Acts.

Importance: It is easy to lose our focus on what the finished product of the sermon should look like and what components it should include. If we are seek to reflect the preaching of the Book of Acts these we will need to keep all of these components in view as we prepare our sermon.

Outcomes: By the end of this session you will: (1) Have refreshed your familiarity with the steps for sermon preparation taught in *Biblical Preaching*, Haddon Robinson<sup>1</sup>, (2) Have several questions to ask of your text and sermon that will help you keep in mind the foundations, the wall and the roof of the sermon structure.

Objectives: (1) You will be able to pursue your sermon preparation with the goals of Missional/Biblical preaching at the forefront of your thinking, and (2) You will be able to evaluate your own sermons by indentifying the inclusion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching, The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic; 2d edition, 2001).

missional elements from the Book of Acts. Note: This Block assumes and is built on a familiarity with Biblical Preaching, Haddon Robinson.

#### **Block IV: Bringing Boldness and Clarity out of the Sermon**

Introduction: In this section we will apply the elements of Biblical-missional preaching to the delivery of the sermon.

Importance: Because the sermon and preaching comes through the life of the preacher, we will focus on bringing the two intangibles of rationality and emotion into the sermon and preaching.

Outcome: By the end of this session you will: (1) Have an increased awareness of the need to preach out of an assurance of calling and with the extraordinary presence of the Holy Spirit. (2) Have freedom to bring rationality into preaching without rationalism.

Objectives: (1) You will be introduced to a review of: the content of the gospel message and the awareness of needs of the audience. (2) You will see the importance of bringing your whole person into preaching. (3) You will keep your focus on the importance of the primary goal of preaching

#### **Block I: Introduction to Biblical Preaching**

Introduction: Biblical preaching is always an act of heralding good news to those who need to hear. Unless we keep this proclamational aspect of preaching at the forefront of our thinking and preparation, we soon lose sight of the very nature of preaching. Missional preaching is preaching on the frontiers as though on a mission field.

Importance: Our preaching should always be both Biblical and missional. If it is not, we will face two equally dangerous risks. The first is that we will be merely talking to ourselves, preaching to the choir. We will have no missional edge, compassion, or patience. We will lose both the passion and power of the evangel. The second risk is that we will become moralistic preachers sailing very close to the wind of a self-works and self-righteous sanctification with all of the priggishness that moralism always generates.

Outcomes: By the end of this session you will be able to (1) define Biblical preaching, (2) explain the missional nature of Biblical preaching, and (3) list the elements necessary for Biblical missional preaching derived from the sermons recorded in the book of Acts.

Objectives: You will be able to differentiate between Biblical preaching and non-Biblical preaching. You will be able to evaluate preaching by identifying the inclusion of the missional elements in the Book of Acts.

### Outline for Teaching Block I

#### 1. Introduction and overview: Biblical Preaching:

##### a. What is Biblical preaching?

- i. Biblical Preaching is the authoritative & bold declaration of the work of God recorded in the Bible in language and thought forms that are familiar to a contemporary audience. Biblical preaching will always seek to reflect the over-all purpose of the Bible, which points to the glory of the divine author as He brings lost rebels to himself. Biblical preaching is based on a specific text of



Scripture, explaining and exposing the meaning of the text in such a way that is consistent with the examples of preaching given to us in the Bible. (However, we need to be as careful as we can to be true to the text and true to the intent of the author, because it is possible to overlook and even miss God, Christ's redemption, and the glory of God in our sermons.

ii. God's work proclaimed in human speech under the influence of the Holy Spirit to a contemporary audience in their own language.

1. Elements of the definition broken down as

- a. Declaration, authoritative, proclamation, as
- b. Ambassador and heralds
- c. Works of God
- d. Bible/Word of God
- e. Contemporary audience
  - i. Language
  - ii. Thought forms
- f. Redemptive
- g. Glory of God

b. Definitions of Expository Preaching

- i. "To expound Scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and people obey him."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott "A Definition of Biblical Preaching," *Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, Haddon Robinson and Craig B. Larson, eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 24.

- ii. “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”<sup>3</sup>
- iii. “The preacher’s task is two-fold: To present the true and exact meaning of the Biblical text... [which] means that the sermon must unfold in the natural flow of thought of the original author in a manner that is relevant to the contemporary listener.... God is presenting truth not simply to a previous generation but to us right now.”<sup>4</sup>
- iv. “The true idea of preaching is that the preacher should become a mouthpiece for his text, opening it up and applying it as a word from God to his hearers, talking only in order that the text itself may speak and be heard,”<sup>5</sup>
- v. “...exposition of God’s written word with a view to applying it to the present and preparing us for the future.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Sunikjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007) 14, cited in J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 28.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Lawson, *Famine in the Land, A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Thomas, *Acts*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011), 44.

2. Biblical Vocabulary of words translated as “Preach” in the Book of Acts. It is helpful to know what that vocabulary is as we think about preaching.<sup>7</sup> At least ten different words used for telling the good news translated are as:
  - a. Addressed
  - b. Proclaiming
  - c. Preaching
  - d. Testifying
  - e. Teaching
  - f. Exhorting
  - g. Declaring
  - h. Evangelizing<sup>8</sup>
3. Biblical preaching contrasted with non-Biblical: It is only when we understanding broadly what a biblical sermon is that we will be able to focus on what we will insist is the only true Biblical preaching, the expository

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 6. “The New Testament uses as many as thirty-three different verbs to describe what we usually cover with the single word *preaching*.” Addressed, declared, *apophtheggomai* (Acts 2:14). Proclaiming, *kataggello* (3:24; 4:2; 13:5; 13:38; 15:36; 16:17; 16:21; 17:3 [with 17:3 also has *dianoigo* and *paratithemi* which the KJV has as opening and alleging.]; 17:13; 17:23). Preached translates three different words in the ESV: *laleo* (10x), (Acts 8:25; 9:27, 29; (Spoke); 11:19; 11:20; 13:42; 14:25; 16:6; 17:19); *euaggelizo* (14x), (Acts 5:42; 8:4, 12, 35, 40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32 (Declare unto you good news [KJV] we bring you good news [ESV]); 14:7, 15, 21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18); *kerusso* (7x) (Acts 8:5; 9:20; 10:37, 42; 15:21; 9:31; 20:25; 28:31). Testifying, *diamarturomai* (7x), (Acts 2:40; 8:25; 18:5; 20:21, 24; 23:11). Teach/Teaching/Doctrine, teaching, (11x) *didache*, *didasko*, (Acts 2:42; 4:2; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 11:26; 15:1; 17:19, 18:11; 18:25; 20:21; 21:28;). Exhorted *parakaleo*, (3x)(Acts 2:40; 11:23; 15:32). Declaring, *anaggello*, (Acts 5:25; 20:20; 20:27), *laleo*, (Acts 2:11 [telling ESV, Speaking KJV]; 11:14).

<sup>8</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Eerdmans, 2000), 10-11. “The modern term, ‘evangelism,’ ...picks up NT language that had long been neglected in the language of Christendom. The NT activity defined as ‘evangelizing’ and ‘evangelization’ focused on the communication of the gospel so that people might respond and become followers of Jesus Christ. Evangelists are bringers of good news, and evangelization is the process by which this news is brought.... Evangelism is too often seen as the initial proclamation of the story and not as the ongoing and continual continuous proclamation of the story for and already believing.”

sermon. Sidney Greidanus uses this chart to show how he defines biblical and non-biblical sermons.

CATEGORIES	TYPES OF SERMONS			
Biblical Content	Biblical Sermon			Non-Biblical Sermon
Use of text	Textual or Expository Sermon		Topical-Biblical Sermon	Topical Sermon
Length of text	Textual Unit	Verse or Clause	Non-textual	Non-textual

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Figure 2: Biblical and Non-Biblical Sermons.

Therefore, a Biblical sermon is one that is based upon either a specific Biblical text or is fully consistent with biblical content. The Biblical sermon may, therefore, be topical as well as textual. It cannot, however, be merely ethical or moral. A Biblical sermon is not a discourse on current events or the audience's felt needs.<sup>10</sup> Although Greidanus allows for topical preaching under the rubric of Biblical preaching and says, "it is theoretically possible to preach a [B]iblical sermon without a specific text," he immediately says, "there are good reasons for insisting on a preaching-text."<sup>11</sup> Knowing that the sermon is textually based gives honor to and

<sup>9</sup> Greidanus, *Ancient Text*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Later in this same work Greidanus quotes Leander Keck, *Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), who says that all too often a text serves only as a pretext and "serves as a catalyst; the actual content of the sermon is derived elsewhere and frequently could have been suggested just as well by a fortune cookie." 101.

<sup>11</sup> Greidanus, *Modern Preacher and Ancient Text*, 123-124. Greidanus lists three reasons: 1) A biblical text gives authority to the sermon, 2) a text offers a framework and guideline for the

exalts the Word of God, gives credibility and authority to the preacher, and honors the eternal needs of the listener who has come to hear a word from the Lord. Richard Lischer does not overstate the importance of Biblical preaching when he claims, “people listen to preaching only when they are convinced that it is the Word of God.”<sup>12</sup> Haddon Robinson challenges us to remember that since listeners’ souls depend on the preacher’s stewardship of the Word, it is his responsibility to show them that what they are hearing actually comes from the Bible:<sup>13</sup>

The Word! There’s the focus. All Christian preaching should be the exposition and application of biblical texts. Our authority as preachers sent by God rises and falls with our manifest allegiance to the text of Scripture. I say ‘manifest’ because there are so many preachers who say they are doing exposition when they do not ground their assertions explicitly—‘manifestly’—in the text. They don’t show their people clearly that the assertions of their preaching are coming from specific, readable words of Scripture that the people can see for themselves.<sup>14</sup>

[I]n the literate Western culture we need to get people to open their Bibles and put their fingers on the text... We are simply pulling rank on people when we tell them and don’t show them from the text. This does not honor the Word of God or the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Introduction and overview: Mission/Missional

- a. Missional is not
  - i. Mission in the sense of Mission and Vision
  - ii. Missions
- b. Three attempts at being missional (unsuccessful)

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preacher, 3) Allows the congregation a touchstone for judging the truthfulness of what is being proclaimed (or claimed!).

<sup>12</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001, previously publ. Labyrinth Press 1992), 48.

<sup>13</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 23.

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God of God in Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 41.

<sup>15</sup> Piper, *Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 41-42.

- i. Audience as King
    - ii. Cultural Capitulation
    - iii. Language acquisition
  - c. Missional is \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Missional Preaching using the Bible's Record as Paradigm
  - a. Overview of the sermonic material in the Book of Acts: Three types of sermons
    - i. Paraenetic (Sermons to preached to believers for encouragement)
    - ii. Missionary/Evangelistic Acts 2
    - iii. Apologetic
  - b. Distilling and identifying the missional elements of the preaching of Acts
    - i. God
      - 1. as author of the text
      - 2. as main actor in the text
      - 3. as sufficient
    - ii. Jesus
      - 1. as center of redemption
      - 2. as example
      - 3. as source and resource
    - iii. Holy Spirit
      - 1. As presence
      - 2. As enabler
      - 3. As power

iv. Gospel Clarity

1. How is the story of redemption shown in this text?
2. How is the audience being called to saving repentance through this text and sermon?
3. How does the freeness and fullness of the Gospel in all of its applications come through in this text and sermon? Such as:
  - a. Regeneration
  - b. Justification
  - c. Adoption
  - d. Assurance
  - e. Sanctification
  - f. Hope

v. Attitude toward Scripture

1. How does this text show a confidence in Scripture?
2. How does this text fit within the flow of the rest of Scripture?

vi. Audience Sensitivity and Awareness

1. How does the preacher in this text speak to his specific audience?
2. What ways does this text speak in a way that is informed and sensitive to its intended audience?

vii. Confidence

1. Do we see the preacher of this sermon speaking as though it is a Word from the Lord?
2. Is there a sense of gospel-driven humility to this sermon?
3. Where is there a gospel-driven boldness to this sermon?

viii. Emotions in Preaching

1. The Text shows the emotions of the original writer
2. The Text shows the emotions of the original hearers
3. The text pulls forth emotions from me

ix. Rationality in Preaching

1. What concept or claim in this text is being proven rather than illustrated?
2. Does the Biblical author of the text use a logical progression or argument to make his point?
3. What appeals to human reason are being made in this sermon?
4. What kinds of rational arguments against the truth of this text are presented in the cultural context and experience of the audience?

Preaching that is Biblical and Missional includes all of this.



## **Block II: Overview of the Framework for Biblical-Missional Preaching**

Introduction: In this section we will see the interplay of components of the Biblical sermon bringing together the foundation of God and His Word, the message to be proclaimed, the preacher as one using natural faculties as well as depending on the call and presence of the Holy Spirit, and awareness of the audience. The goal is to preach for the glory of God and the good of the individual hearer.

Importance: We will see the sermon as a complete structure with a foundation, four walls, and a roof. If either the foundation or the walls are missing or unstable the roof will collapse. The sermon will not achieve the twin goals of bringing glory to God or good to the people who hear. It is possible to present a discourse on the Scripture that has both passion and application and miss the mark of true Biblical-Missional preaching.

Outcomes: By the end of the session the student will be able to (1) Name the four foundations for Biblical-Missional preaching, (2) See the Gospel as a two-fold message of grace in salvation and sanctification, (3) Identify the external and internal components that make for bold, clear, and confident preaching (Walls) (4) Name the two overarching goals in preaching: God's glory and the eternal good of the hearer.

Objectives: The student will be able to produce a process for keeping the components of Biblical preaching in view as you prepare to preach. The student will have tools for evaluating sermons according to the Biblical-Missional grid.

## Outline for teaching Block II:

### 1. The four foundations for Biblical-Missional Preaching:

#### a. God-Exalting

- i. God as the author of every text
- ii. God as the main actor in every story
- iii. God as the gift to be received in every passage
- iv. God as sufficient for every question or need raised in this passage

#### b. Christ-Centered

- i. Christ as the goal of redemptive History
- ii. Christ as the source of redemption
- iii. Christ as the resource for holy living

#### c. Holy-Spirit Dependent

- i. The Holy Spirit as guarantor of the Scripture's validity
- ii. The Holy Spirit as presence in exegesis, interpretation and preaching
- iii. The Holy Spirit as power in application

#### d. Scripturally-Based

- i. The sermon is driven by and exposit a specific text
- ii. The sermon shows the connection between this text and the wider story of Scripture, how it fits within the whole of redemptive history.
- iii. The sermon is based on sound hermeneutical principles

- iv. The sermon reflects both Biblical and Systematic theology

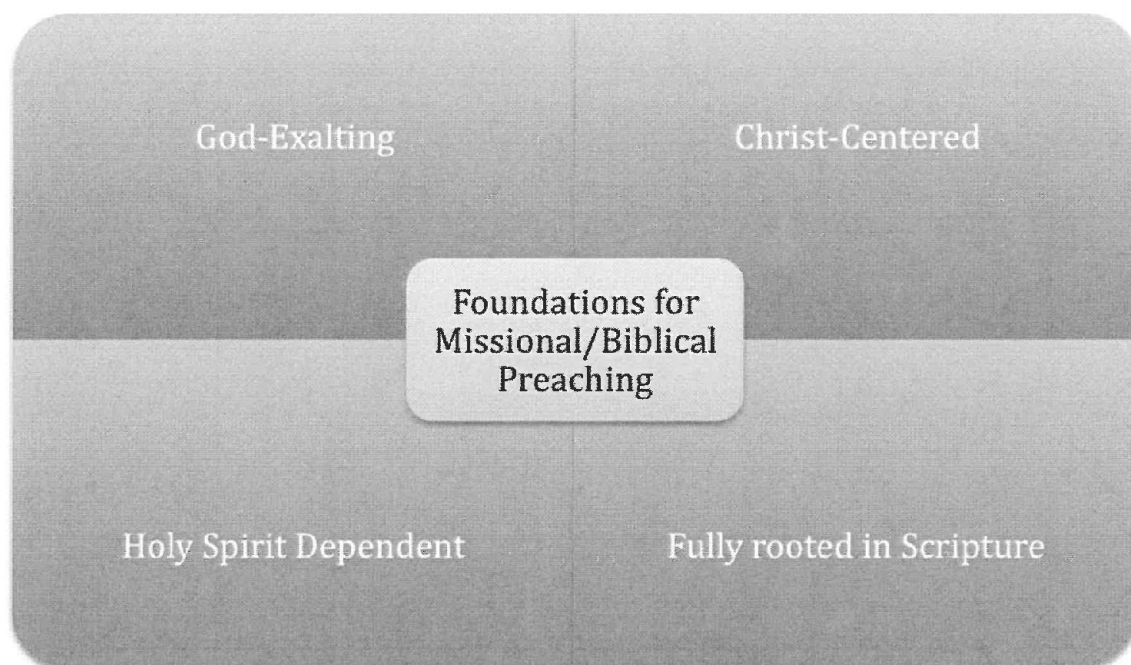


Figure 3: Foundations for Biblical/Missional Preaching.

2. The four walls for Biblical and Missional Preaching
  - a. The Sender— The preacher's Internal Power
    - i. God by the Holy calls and sends the preacher (as herald and ambassador)
    - ii. God empowers the Preacher (Unction)
  - b. The Messenger: How can the Preacher to preach with boldness? The internal power of Personality (Emotions and Rationality)
  - c. The Message: How is the Gospel to be presented? We must remember that the message is always Good News. What is the Content of the Gospel?
    - i. Gospel in Redemption

- ii. The Gospel in Sanctification
- d. The receptor audience: What must the preacher keep in mind regarding the audience?
  - i. Awareness of the Audiences cultural and intellectual context
  - ii. Sensitivity the audience's questions, concerns and possible resistance to the message of this passage

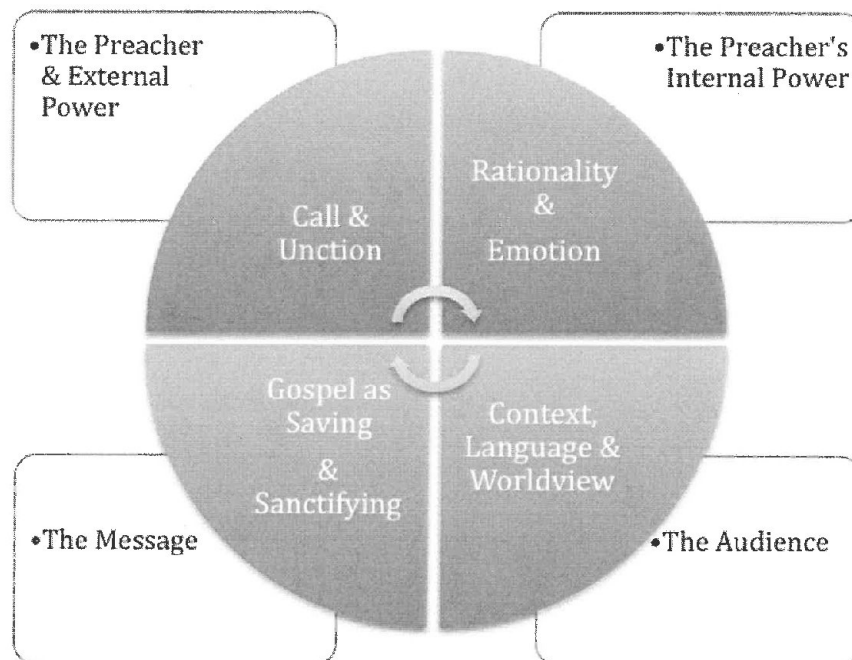


Figure 4: The Walls of Biblical/Missional Preaching.

- 3. The four walls are made up of two parallel sets of interactions which result in boldness and confidence
  - a. External Power
    - i. Call
    - ii. Unction
  - b. Internal Power

- i. Emotions
- ii. Rationality

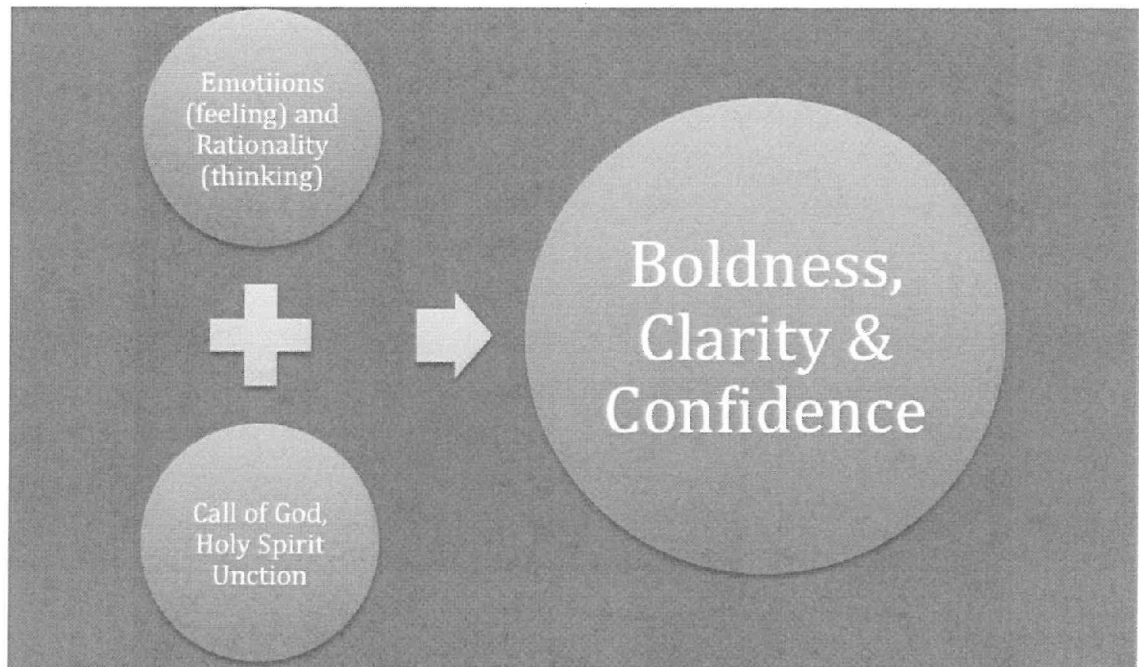


Figure 5: Boldness in Biblical/Missional Preaching.

4. The Gospel (both as a message of Salvation and a message of Sanctification) is combined with an awareness and concern for the worldview and cultural framework of the audience to engender communication and acceptance of the message and moves the sermon toward its goal of helping people and bringing glory to God.

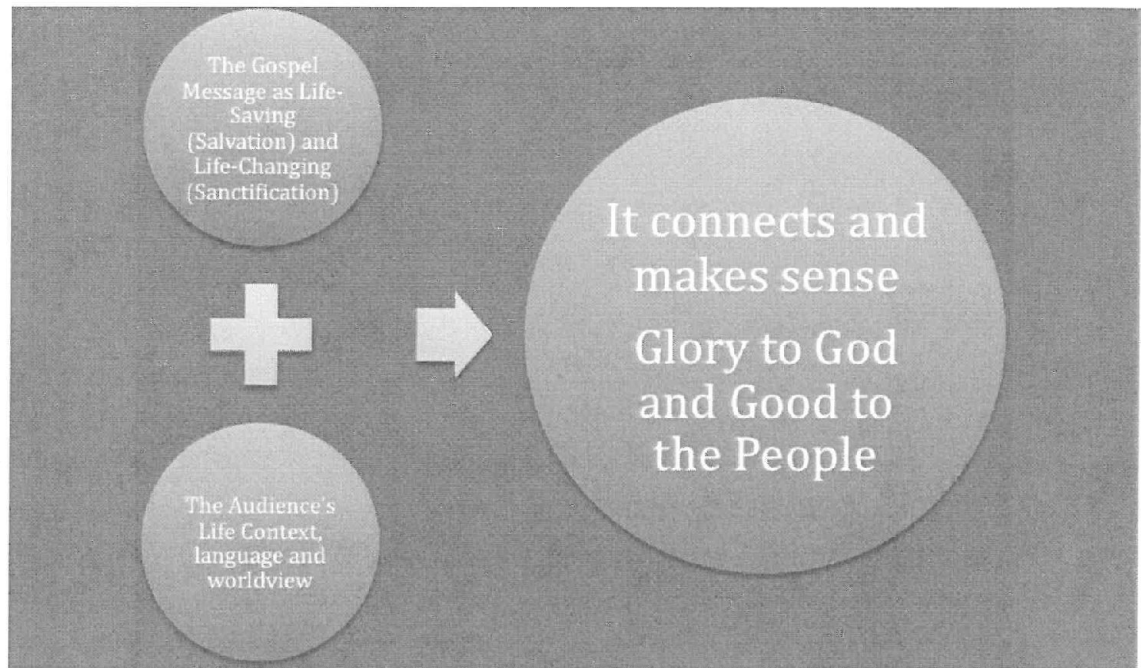


Figure 6: The Message and Audience in Biblical/Missional Preaching.

5. The Roof: The goals for Biblical-Missional Preaching?

a. Glory to God

- i. What are the works of God that exalt Him in this passage?
- ii. What is in this text that is and can only be accomplished by God?
- iii. How does this text show that God is big and mankind is either small or in great need of God?

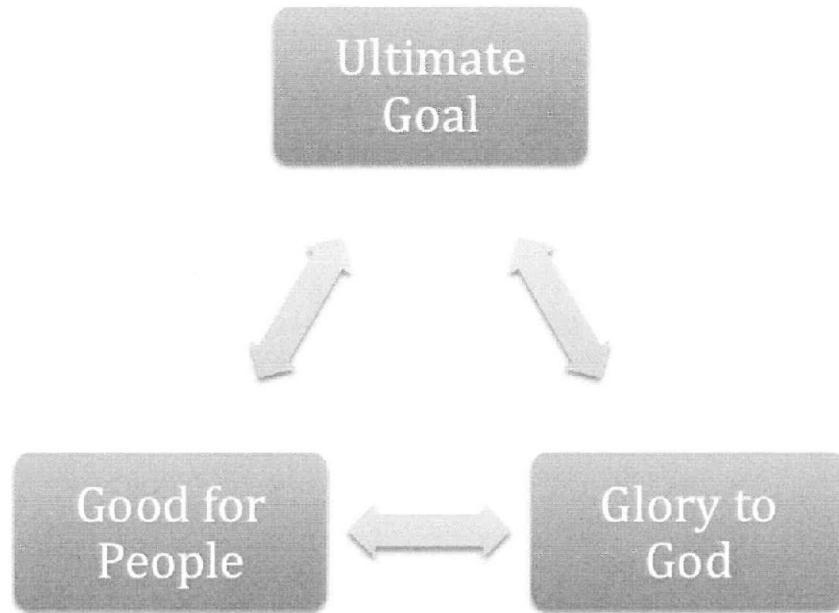


Figure 7: The Ultimate Goal of Biblical/Missional Preaching.

b. Good for People.

- i. What in this passage shows that God has promised to provide or is providing for my needs?
- ii. How does this passage show that God answers my audience's ultimate and primal needs?

**Block III: Building the Framework: Putting together the Foundation and Walls of the internal and external power of the preacher.**

Introduction: In this section we will go through the steps of building the sermon so that it will reflect the missional aspects and fulfill the goals of the [Biblical] preaching seen in the Book of Acts.

Importance: It is easy to lose our focus on what the finished product of the sermon should look like and what components it should include. If we are seeking to reflect

the preaching in the Book of Acts, we will need to keep all of these components in view as we prepare our sermons.

Outcome: By the end of this session the student will (1) Have refreshed your familiarity with the steps for sermon preparation taught in Biblical Preaching, Haddon Robinson. (2) Have several questions to ask of your text and sermon that will help you keep in mind the foundations, the walls and the goal (roof) of the sermon.

Objectives: (1) You will be able to pursue your sermon preparation with the goals of Missional/Biblical preaching at the forefront of your thinking, (2) You will be able to evaluate your own sermons by indentifying the inclusion and use of the missional elements from the Book of Acts.

Outline for Teaching Block III:

1. Putting the Pieces Together:

- a. Review the Processes of *Biblical Preaching*, Haddon Robinson.
- b. Step I Determine the Text
- c. Step II Study the Passage
- d. Step III Discover the Exegetical Idea.
- e. Step IV Analyzing the Exegetical Idea
- f. Step V Formulating the Homiletical Idea (In addition to the questions posed by Haddon Robinson, apply the questions from Building the Foundation in the following section)
- g. Step VI Determining the Sermon's Purpose
- h. Step VII Deciding how to Accomplish the Sermon's Purpose



- i. Step VIII Outlining the Sermon
  - j. Step IX Filling in the sermon outline
  - k. Step X Preparing the Introduction and Conclusion
2. Laying the Foundation Stones: It is important during the exegetical and analytical steps to keep the four foundations of Missional-Biblical Preaching at the forefront of your thinking. It is easy to take them for granted. However, when they are assumed or taken for granted, they are also easily forgotten or overlooked.

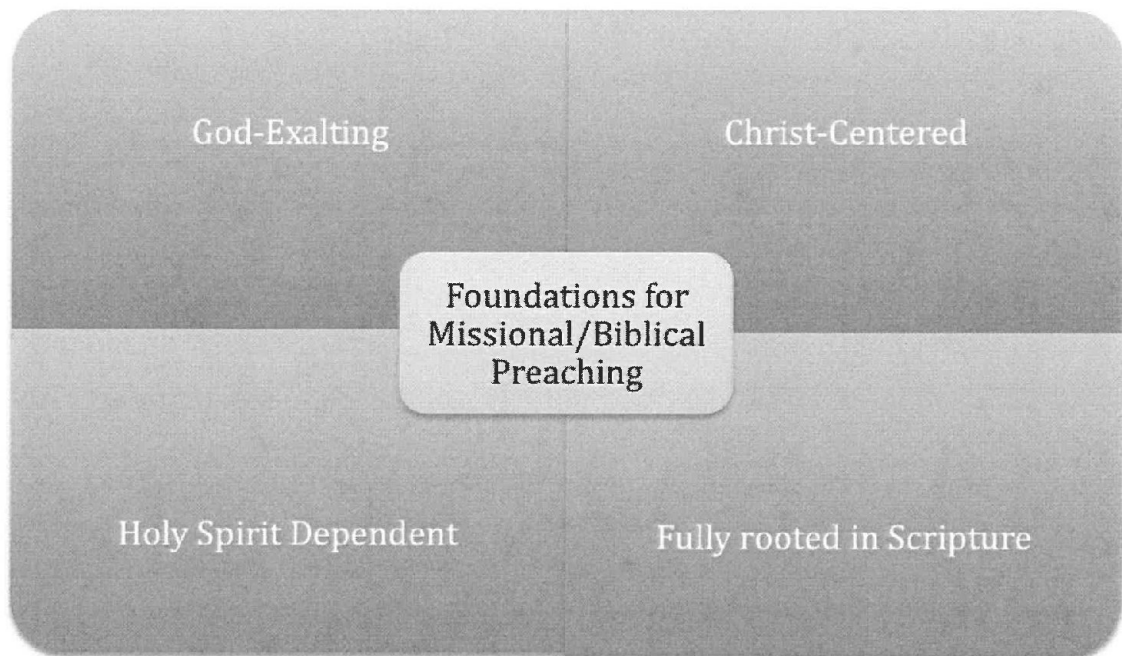


Figure 8: Foundations for Biblical/Missional Preaching.

- a. Questions to ask in order to make the sermon God-Exalting.
  - i. Where is God in this passage?
  - ii. How is God shown to be the main actor in this passage?
  - iii. What are the works of God that are displayed in this passage?

- iv. How does this passage show God's concern for His Glory?
  - v. How does this passage show God's concern for the good of people?
  - vi. What is being said here that only God can do?
  - vii. How can I display the sufficiency of God in this sermon?
- b. Questions to ask in order to make the sermon Christ-Centered
- i. How is Jesus Christ seen in this passage as the center of redemption? Is he presented in a type?
  - ii. How can this passage show Christ as the source of Redemption and of gospel living?
  - iii. How does this passage show how Christ's life and work answer the concerns of the "Fallen Human Condition"  
(Bryan Chappel)
  - iv. How is Christ the answer to questions regarding contemporary issues and living?
- c. Questions to ask in order to make the sermon Holy Spirit-Dependent
- i. What in this passage shows the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer? The unbeliever?
  - ii. How is the Spirit shown, or needed as enabler for obedience to the commands of God?
  - iii. Does this passage call on the listener for greater dependence upon the Holy Spirit?

- iv. How does this passage fight for truth and righteousness in the life of the believer?
  - v. How does this passage fight for the salvation of the unbeliever?
- d. Questions to ask in order to make certain the sermon is fully rooted in Scripture.
- i. How does the genre of this passage matter in developing the sermon?
  - ii. How does this text fit within the greater story of Scripture (asking the questions of Biblical theology) At this point it is helpful to return to Step II and answer the Questions of Biblical/Theological Context in Robinson.
  - iii. How is this text used in other Biblical texts?
  - iv. How does this text relate to other Biblical texts?
  - v. How does this text address specific doctrines of systematic theology?
  - vi. Does this text itself show a dependence on or confidence in the Scripture?
  - vii. Does this text lend itself more to encouragement of the believer living in a missional setting, or as an evangelistic thrust for the recipients of the mission?
  - viii. Are there supporting and Apparently contradicting Scriptures (Questions of Biblical Theology)

ix. Can this passage be used as an apologetic for the Gospel?

3. Building the Walls: Questions to ask about the Gospel Message

- a. Where is the story of Redemption, how is it shown in this text?
- b. How does truth of the Gospel apply to the life of the believer in this text?

How can is audience being called to saving repentance through this text and sermon?

- c. What is the connection of this text between Old and New Testaments?
- d. Which Elements of the Gospel Story are here?
- e. How does the freeness and fullness of the Gospel in all of its applications come through in this text and sermon?

- i. Regeneration

- ii. Justification

- iii. Adoption

- iv. Assurance

- v. Sanctification

- vi. Hope

4. Building the Walls: Questions to ask about the audience?

- a. How does the preacher in this text speak to his specific audience?
- b. What ways does this text speak in a way that is informed and sensitive to its intended audience?

- c. What do I know about my audience that informs the way I handle this text in a sermon?
- d. What more can I learn about my audience that will help me properly exposit this text?

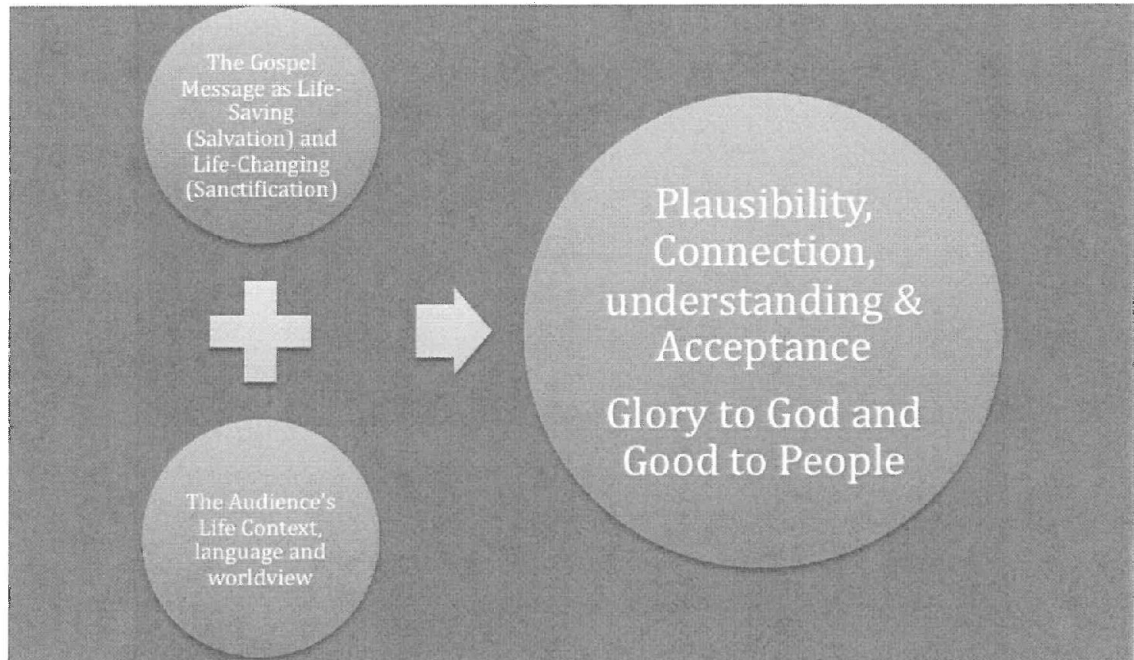


Figure 9: Connecting the Gospel message and the audience's life setting in Biblical-Missional Preaching.

#### **Block IV: Bringing Boldness and Clarity out of the Sermon**

Introduction: In this section we will apply the elements of Biblical-missional preaching to the delivery of the sermon.

Importance: Because is the sermon and preaching comes through the life of the preacher, we will focus on bringing the two intangibles of rationality and emotion into the sermon and preaching.

Outcome: By the end of this session the student will (1) Have an increased awareness of the need to preach out of an assurance of calling and with the extraordinary presence of the Holy Spirit. (2) Have freedom to bring rationality into preaching without rationalism.

Objectives: (1) The student will be introduced to a review of The content of the gospel message and an awareness of needs of the audience, (2) see the importance of bringing the whole person into preaching, (3) keep the focus on the importance of the primary goal of preaching.

Outline for teaching Block IV:

1. The Walls of God and Self: After determining that the foundation is properly in place we move to building the walls of our sermon. The four walls are interplay of the subjective and the objective elements preaching. The preacher must be aware of the interior person as well as the exterior audience and the objectivity of the message. By engaging with the external elements the preacher allows the interior person to come out in the sermon. This interplay gives clarity and plausibility to the message, establishes trust and connection in the audience, credibility and genuineness to the preacher, and both boldness and confidence in the delivery.
2. Building the Walls:
  - a. Seeking the Holy Spirit. First is the constant awareness of the call of God on the preacher and a longing for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in preaching. This is the preacher's understanding and awareness of the presence and power of God in preaching. This is also the first and

most basic step of moving toward confidence as a preacher of the Gospel. The issue of call is one that is answered not only once at the beginning of a preacher's ministry, but repeatedly throughout the years. Discouragement and self-doubt are constant companions to the preacher's work. If there is not a touchstone of call and regular visits to that touchstone, there will be deep erosion into the preacher's confidence and ability to work. Confidence in the call is not from a self-authenticating evaluation. There is personal and individual work, yes, but the authentication and reevaluation of the call is best done with faithful and honest mentors, elders, and peers. In conjunction with the establishment of call there is also a regular and consistent desire and longing for the supernatural in preaching. Every preacher knows the grief and downheartedness that accompanies most preaching. One cannot preach alone, without the attendance of the power and infilling of God's Spirit. It should be the preacher's regular prayer and quest to have this "holy unction" in preaching.

- i. How does this text drive me to a dependence on the Holy Spirit in understanding, interpretation, presentation, and application?
- ii. How does this passage increase my sense of humility?
- iii. How does my understanding of the Gospel give me boldness as I preach this passage?
- iv. What in this passage encourages me as a bold preacher?
- v. What can I say with clarity, fresh expression from this passage?

- b. Building the Walls: The faith, and reason (rationality) of the preacher.
- i. The preacher is never a neutral conduit for the message that is preached. While the presence of God in preaching is meant to be sought and apprehended, the preacher is a person with a unique set of experiences, personality, emotional make-up, and intellectual perspectives and abilities. Preaching is not some sort of disembodied communication from God to the congregation irrespective of the whole person of the preacher. The use of emotions and rationality allows the preacher to establish credibility and solidarity with the audience.
  - ii. Questions to ask about the use of rationality in this passage?
    1. What in this passage challenges, stretches or increases my faith in God, the Gospel, or Scripture?
    2. What concept or claim in this text is being proven rather than illustrated?
    3. Does the Biblical author of the text use a logical progression or argument to make his point?
    4. What appeals to human reason are being made in this text and will need to be shown in the sermon?
  - iii. What kinds of rational arguments against the truth of this text are presented in the cultural context and experience of the preacher's audience?



- iv. Return to the questions in Step IV and ask them again
  - 1. What does this main idea of this passage mean?
  - 2. Do I believe this is true?
  - 3. What do I need to have proven to me?
- c. How is this passage and its meaning changing and affecting my own understanding and life? Emotions.
  - i. Have I felt the truth of this passage?
  - ii. What are the emotions that this passage and sermon excite or raise in me?

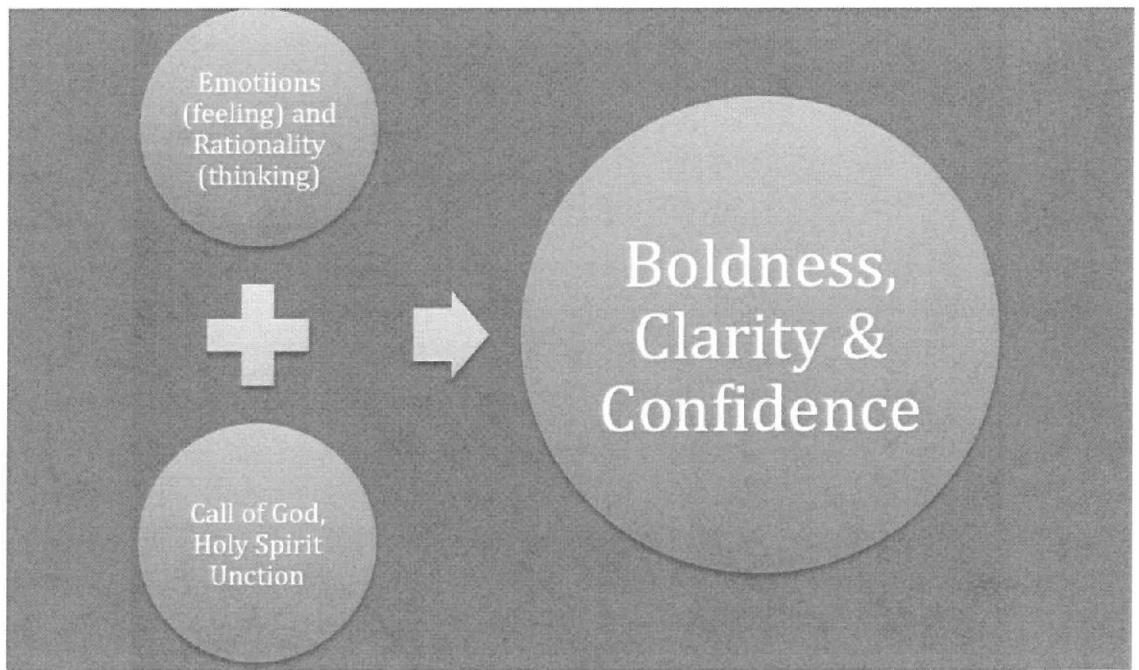


Figure 10: Boldness in Biblical/Missional Preaching.

3. Setting the Roof in place: The two-fold goal in Biblical-Missional Preaching.

Every time you preach a sermon you will want to do all in your power or under your control to bring a message that is birthed out of sensitivity to and a desire for obedience to the two greatest commandments: Love to God and Love to Neighbor. Another way of saying this is God's Glory and Neighbor's Good. Because every preacher is a fallen creature the tendency and temptation of every one of us will be to preach for our own glory, even at the expense of the good of our audience. We will want to guard against the temptation to bring glory to ourselves by impressing our audience with anything that is of and through, us rather than of, through, and for this two-pronged goal.

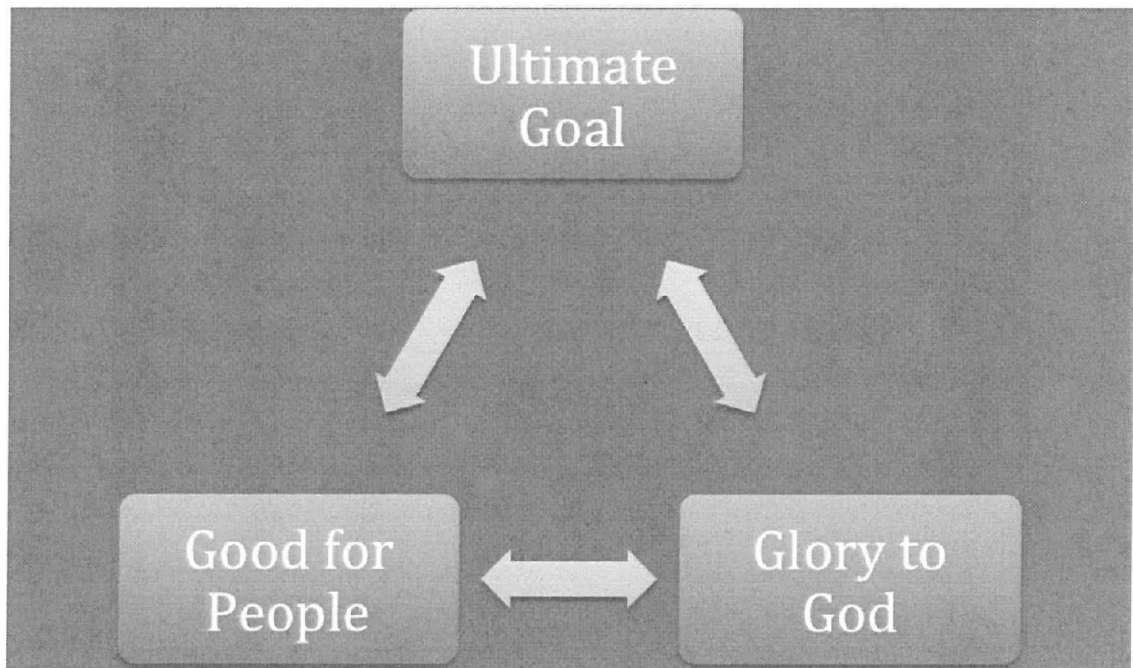


Figure 11: The Ultimate Goal of Biblical/Missional Preaching.

4. If the foundation of the sermon is properly laid and the four walls are carefully raised, we should see a proper roof on the structure; a roof that points to God's Glory and Neighbor's Good. The sermon preparation can never become so familiar and so formulaic that the foundations are ignored. The foundations will be properly laid and the walls properly erected when the roof is kept in view.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PROJECT EVALUATION AND OUTCOMES**

This paper has addressed the question of how one is to approach preaching in a manner that is both Biblical and Missional. With so much emphasis on niche and contextualized preaching in contemporary homiletics literature, my goal was to present a model of preaching that will be applicable in every time, place, and culture—in other words in every Age of Mission. In Chapter 1, we were given an historical and cultural overview of the current setting in North America as well as the suggestion that Biblical preaching must be able to transcend it and every other cultural context. In Chapter 2, three unsuccessful models of Missional preaching were discussed. These were followed by the presentation of a model for preaching that is drawn from the narrative and preaching in the Book of Acts. Acts serves as an appropriate model, since it covers the early missionary expansion of the Church. The goal is not to present a new methodology for effectiveness, but a Biblical model for faithfulness. Chapter 3 gives a brief overview of the literature consulted in the process of researching the setting for preaching, current preaching trends, and a model for Biblical-Missional preaching.

Chapter 4, presented a manual composed of four instructional blocks to teach the structural concepts of Biblical-Missional Preaching with an emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. The four instructional blocks were designed to present the material so that the student could see the foundations, the wall and the roof of the sermon structure. The goal was to present this material so that preachers could be freed from thinking that methodology is the key to effectiveness,

contextualization is imperative for effectiveness, and that emotion and/or rationality in preaching are to be feared. All of this was to be undergirded by an appeal to the necessity for the Holy Spirit's involvement with the preaching under the category of *unction*.

## **Findings**

The workshop material was presented to 11 participants on 26 January, 2012 from 9:00 A.M. – 3:30 P.M.

Nine participants were present for the entire day.

Two could only come for half a day, each due to last-minute schedule changes.

All eleven participants were men.

Five participants were pastors, one was a church planter with three years of experience; two had 10-15 years of experience, two had over 25 years of experience.

Five participants were interested congregants and prospective seminary students.

One participant was an elder with 38 years and with significant preaching experience.

All of the participants expressed appreciation for the material, especially noting that the section on "Unction" was new and helpful to them.

One participant in particular said that the material was "life-changing" and had freed him from the tension of having to give up an openness to the Holy Spirit in favor of preaching with intellectual integrity.

## **Instructional Experience**

I had been cautioned that I might have too much material to present in the allotted time. This fear was realized when I needed 95 minutes to cover Block I.

This meant that I rushed through the material in Block II. I also rushed the material

in Block III to ensure that I had completed it before the allotted time expired. Block IV was also a bit rushed, since this was the most important material to me and I wanted to ensure that I covered it all. In retrospect, I would either not include as much basic introductory material in Block I or I would expand the workshop to include a fifth block and expand the material presented in Block IV with more emphasis on rationality and emotions in preaching.

The workbooks were not as easy to follow during the presentation as I anticipated. I should have added Scripture references to my workbook. I did not add them originally, since the material had been presented in the body of the thesis project. Some of the participants suggested that the material be given over two days to allow for more comprehension and dialogue. This is something I would gladly consider. I can restructure the material so that it can be presented in more than one day.

There was a distinct difference in the response to the material and the interaction with the participants based on their education and preaching experience. I do not think this detracted from the overall effectiveness of the workshop, but it is something I am concerned about and will need to take into account in future presentations. It would be helpful to have background information available ahead of time regarding the participants' education and experience. It would also be beneficial to allow the participants an opportunity to introduce themselves and give some background information during the workshop. I knew ten of the eleven participants personally, so I was able to include some of that information during the presentation.

I was very happy to see the amount of interaction between the participants during the teaching sessions as well as the break times. None of the participants knew all of the other participants before the day began. It was a wonderful experience for me to have these men give their time to me for this project. It seemed to me that everyone enjoyed the experience.

### **Personal**

I would gladly present the material in another setting if given the opportunity. I have grown in my own understanding of preaching, and I am convinced that this material would be helpful for others. One of the hindrances to completing this thesis project has been the ongoing excitement that I have had in learning and expanding my view of how I am to preach if I mean to preach Biblically and Missionally. My own preaching has benefitted from this learning experience. I came to this project with biases and perspectives that have been challenged, in some cases changed, and in still others strengthened.

My own continued study will include the pursuit of knowing better how to show dependence on the Holy Spirit of God in my preaching, while seeking to bring my whole person, including emotions and rationality, into my preaching. My hope is that this material will challenge others to grow in the same areas.

## APPENDIX 1: INCARNATIONAL

I use this word intentionally in the discussion of missional in chapter two since it shows up in so much of current evangelism and mission literature. Taking the model of the coming of Christ into the world and His taking on of Humanity in all of its aspects—save sin—we are told that we too must enter the world of our listeners, take on their flesh, and live among them. For many writers, incarnational ministry is being Christ in their world. However, for some, the “flesh” that we are to take on in this context is the culture. For example we read in Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches, Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*,<sup>1</sup>

Those who call themselves Christian must take seriously the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He took on our culture and our practices and became one of us. He participated in the local life of the Jews in all their cultured variety. He made himself accessible ‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [literally, ‘pitched his tent’] among us. As Jesus did, we must immerse ourselves in the local cultures of our time. As Jesus did, we must provide a critique, but that evaluation must come from within rather than be imposed from outside the cultural context.

Two comments here: 1) The Gospel does not say that Jesus took on culture but that “The Word became flesh” i.e. that God became human, or took on humanity. This is the same emphasis we read in Romans 8:3; Philippians 2:5-8; Galatians 4:4; and Hebrews 2:17. In none of these texts is culture the issue, human flesh the remainder of indwelling sin are. Christ did come to redeem culture, but that redemption comes through His becoming human, not through His becoming Jewish. 2) Jesus did critique First Century Judaism as a Jew, that is, from within, but when

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches, Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 2005), 16.



Paul speaks to the Athenians in Acts 17, he critiques their religious practice from the outside, also as a Jew, not a Greek.

Moreover it seems this term needs to be reined in and used more narrowly and with greater Biblical specificity. Gibbs and Bolger turn incarnation on its head and say that the church needs to be Incarnational in its worship meaning that all that the worshipper is in his or her culture needs to be brought before God in Worship.<sup>2</sup> This incautious use of incarnation suggests that all of culture can be good. If culture were to be critiqued and evaluated as they say, then it certainly would follow that not all of culture is benign. In this same vein Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert write “It is very popular to assume that missions is always Incarnational. And of course on one level this is true. We go and live among the people. We try to emulate the humility and sacrifice of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11). But incarnationalism in missions often means more than this. It means that we model our ministry on Jesus’ ministry.”<sup>3</sup>

Eckhard J. Schnabel Writes,

I submit that the use of the term ‘incarnational’ is not very helpful to describe the task of authentic Christian missionary work. The event of the coming of Jesus into the world is unique, unrepeatable and incomparable, making it preferable to use other terminology to express the attitudes and behavior that Paul describes in 1 Cor 9:19-23. The Johannine missionary commission in Jn 20:21 does not demand an ‘incarnation’ of Jesus’ disciples but rather their obedience, unconditional commitment and robust activity in the service of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely John who describes the mission of Jesus as unique: Jesus is the ‘only’ Son (Jn 1:14, 18; 3:14, 18), he is preexistent (Jn 1:1, 14), his relationship to the Father is unparalleled (Jn 1:14, 18). For John, it is not the manner of Jesus’ coming into the world, the Word becoming flesh, the incarnation, that is a ‘model’ for believers; rather, it is the nature of Jesus’ relationship to the Father who sent him into the world, which is one of obedience

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<sup>2</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 75. 76. 80).

<sup>3</sup> “Is Incarnational the Best Way to Describe the Church?”  
<http://www.9marks.org/ejournal/book-excerpt-“incarnational”-best-way-describe-christian-mission-0>,  
(accessed 2/7/2011).

to and dependence upon the Father. . . .The terms 'contextualization' or 'inculturation' certainly are more helpful.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission, Volume 2: Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1574-1575, quoted by internet blogger Justin Taylor March, 1, 2012 <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2012/03/01/why-incarnational-ministry-is-not-the-best-terminology/> (accessed March 1, 2012).

## APPENDIX 2: KINGDOM OF GOD

The Kingdom of God is another term that is frequently used in the Missional conversation and especially among the adherents of the emerging church. Sadly the definition being used by the Emerging church tends more toward the emphases of the nineteenth century protestant liberalism and the social gospel than it seeks to remain faithful to the later understanding of George Eldon Ladd and his dual focus of “already and not yet.” An example of these differences is seen by comparing Ladd to the contemporary emergent writer Brian McLaren. Ladd defined the kingdom of God as “...the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and that this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God’s reign.”<sup>1</sup> Brian McLaren’s thinking on the Kingdom<sup>2</sup> is paraphrased by DeYoung and Kluck:

The Kingdom message is a summons to participate with God in His dream for humanity. His revolution of love and reconciliation. It is an invitation to join the party of God and be part of His worldwide mission to heal and be healed. It is a call to join the network of God that breaks down the walls of racism, nationalism, and ecological harm. The kingdom of God is like a dance of love, vitality, harmony, and celebration.

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<sup>1</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 68ff.

<sup>2</sup> Brian McLaren *The Secret Message of Jesus, Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006), 134-138.

DeYoung and Kluck address the failures of the emerging church's use of the Kingdom of God at greater length in *Why We are not Emergent by Two Guys who Should Be*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We are Not Emergent by Two Guys Who Should Be*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008. 184- 188. See also George Eldon Ladd "What is the Kingdom of God?" <http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Last%20Things/kogladd.html>, accessed 2/3/2022; Peter Leithart, "The Kingdom of God" <http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Last%20Things/kogladd.html>, (accessed 2/3/2011); and Gerhardus Vos "The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God," <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/gvkingdom.htm>, (accessed February 2, 2011).

### APPENDIX 3: PREACHING AS SPIRITUAL WARFARE.

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit is necessary because preaching is not merely a human endeavor carried out on the plane of this visible world. “Preaching is always spiritual conflict and warfare, [which] is seeking to establish the kingdom of God in places [hearts] where the rule of Satan has been previously established.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul identifies our task in II Corinthians 10:3-5 when he says, “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”

If the task of Gospel proclamation could have been done in the flesh—then one wonders if God would have sent his Spirit to carry along the task. Both in the Gospels and the Epistles there are two realities that should make us aware of and alert to the warfare nature of preaching. The first reality is that Jesus came declaring that the Kingdom of God has come. This means that the ruler of this world is to be ousted. The second reality is the continuous and normal engagement with the demonic. It is so easy in the context of this writer (North American and Post-Enlightenment) to shrug off this engagement as something of the past or that happens in another place. It is not the purpose of this study to look at spiritual warfare in general, or even the role or power of the demonic in Acts even though the Spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn A. Nielson, “Preaching Doctrine in a Postmodern Age” *Concordia* 27, no. 1 (2001), 17-29, 20.

and the Demonic are ever present in the narrative.<sup>2</sup> However, we will look at the necessity of (1) seeing our task from the perspective of warfare, and (2) focus on the warfare that each individual faces from the power and lure of idols in one's own life.

We who preach are heralds of The King. This king has sent us to announce the good news of his reign in the world. What we hear and seek to proclaim as good news is not always received as such. Two parables from Jesus illustrate this truth (Vineyard, Wretches). There is a battle of spiritual dimensions that each preacher and each listener will fight every time the word is proclaimed.<sup>3</sup> There is first a battle that must be addressed and fought in our own hearts. It is the same battle that our listeners face and that which we are calling them to fight. I must face the fact that in my own heart the king often does not have supremacy. When the preacher stands to preach, the war for his heart comes in two ways. The first is the battle of worship. In other words, who is to be feared by the preacher when preaching? Who will be worshipped? Anxiety and stage fright come to us in different levels. Some are just a bit nervous when speaking; others are nearly paralyzed. Why is this? It is fair to say that for the serious and sensitive preacher, the fear comes from the weight of the

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<sup>2</sup> Anaias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit (5:1-11), people freed who had been afflicted with "unclean spirits" (4:16; 8:4-8), Simon the Magician (8:9-25), the magician Elymas (13:8), The Fortune telling Girl in Philippi (16:16-24), Sons of Sceva (19:11-20), The violent resistance of the Jewish Leaders and –do not preach, imprisonment, martyrdom, riots, The Revolt against the gospel in Ephesus (19:21ff).

<sup>3</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: Second Series* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1877), 146. "The pulpit is the Thermopylae of Christendom: there the fight will be lost or won. To us ministers the maintenance of our power in the pulpit should be our great concern, we must occupy that spiritual watch-tower with our hearts and minds awake and in full vigor. It will not avail us to be laborious pastors if we are not earnest preachers. We shall be forgiven a great many sins in the matter of pastoral visitation if the people's souls are really fed on the Sabbath-day; but fed they must be, and nothing else will make up for it. The failures of most ministers who drift down the stream may be traced to inefficiency in the pulpit. The chief business of a captain is to know how to handle his vessel, nothing can compensate for deficiency there, and so our pulpits must be our main care, or all will go awry."

message and the importance of the One being represented. Granted, no one wants to misrepresent the king. Souls and eternity are at stake. It is to be feared that, however, that many preachers are tempted to more concerned with embarrassing themselves than they are their king. They do not worship or fear the king whom they represent more than they worship and serve their own desires to do well and be well thought of. The preacher who fears for himself has not gotten an adequate view of the task, nor a sufficient confidence in either the message or the sender of the message. Every preacher would do well to regularly read books and meditate on the Biblical concept of the Fear of the Lord. Martin Luther addressed this in his own time. For Luther the act of preaching is the delivery of the Word of God. Most of us would quickly agree to that. We preach the words of God taken from the Word of God. We are explaining and expounding that Word in language and concepts that we hope will make sense to our audience. This is not what Luther meant. He meant and said: "When the preacher speaks, God speaks!"<sup>4</sup> Luther meant what few of us would claim, "Here God speaks...the pastor must be sure that God speaks through his mouth, otherwise it is time for him to be quiet."<sup>5</sup> The Scripture is very clear that the fear of man will be a snare, a trap (Proverbs 29:25). The preacher must know whom to worship in his preaching. If he is uncertain, the enemy will win the battle for the sermon and quite possibly the souls of the people who are listening. As the preacher, I must fear God first. I can fear him first when I understand that in the sermon I am preaching I am speaking the words of God as His appointed ambassador and representative who will

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12. <sup>4</sup> Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983),

<sup>5</sup> Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 12.

be called to give an account, even a double account as James tells us (James 3:2). It must be for us as it was for Luther:

[P]reaching was not a preacher's ideas stimulated by the prod of a text. It was not human reflections about God and life. It was not searching around in one's personal religious insights for some kind of contemporary message that one thinks people need. Christian preaching—when it is faithful to the word of God in the Scriptures about our need and God's response to it—is God speaking. When it focuses on what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ, it is God's own audible address to all who hear it, just as surely as if Christ himself had spoken it.<sup>6</sup>

This is good for the preacher. It is confidence and courage. It is freedom. But it is not enough to believe that “When the preacher speaks, God speaks.” Preaching is the mightiest weapon in the heavenly panoply, a weapon that is needed, because every time the preacher speaks there are listeners whose eternal lives are the booty of the battle:

For Luther, the Word and its proclamation are weapons by which God subdues His enemies and frees people from bondage.... Every sermon is [a] part of the cosmic warfare that began with the incarnation and continues after Christ's death and resurrection in spite of the victory he obtained. The Word, written and preached, is the sword with which he pursues the struggle up to the last day.... Aside from this war, the word and what it sets in motion in the souls of people cannot be understood.<sup>7</sup>

Luther divided preaching into two disciplines: teaching and exhortation. Inform the mind and appeal to the will. “It all sounds calm and intellectual.”<sup>8</sup> There is nothing cool and intellectual about preaching. “Preaching is no cosy [*sic*] chat but a taking on of hell in preaching the gospel to sinners.... Heaven and hell lock in battle when the

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<sup>6</sup> Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 25.



gospel is preached.”<sup>9</sup> John Piper catches the heart of the battlefield preacher when he writes,

All genuine preaching is rooted in a feeling of desperation. You wake up on Sunday morning and you can smell the smoke of hell on one side and feel the crisp breezes of heaven on the other. You go to your study and look down at your pitiful manuscript, and you kneel down and cry, ‘God, this is so weak, who do I think I am? What audacity to think that in three hours my words will be the odor of death to death and the fragrance of life to life (2 Cor. 2:16). My God, who is sufficient for these things?’”<sup>10</sup>

There is an instructional aspect of preaching that is meant to train the present and rising generation for eternity. There must also be an exhortation and a call to come away from and renounce the enemy and to live henceforth for the rightful king. This is why Luther preached every sermon, and so should we, not as if he were in a classroom, but instead on a battleground!<sup>11</sup> With this view of preaching, fear is notched up to a higher level. Who cares what people think of the sermon from a technical and homiletical point of view? There is no apologizing after the sermon. It is done, that battle is over and we leave it to the King. The words from Luther’s most famous hymn should be ringing in our ears at this point: *The Prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him.*

At the same time we must keep a present awareness that we are preaching God’s Word, not our own words. There is a right fearsomeness in this, which Paul admits when he tells the Corinthians that he came to them “in fear and much trembling” (I Corinthians 2:3). There is a fear that comes from the contrast between

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Jeffrey, *Preachers Who Made a Difference*, (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2004), 14.

<sup>10</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 37-38.

<sup>11</sup> Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 37-38.

the gravity of the message and the utter powerlessness of the preacher to do independently from God, God's work. If we fail to live in these two realities, it is nothing less than a "glaring reminder of our sickening pride. We are in over our heads. Much is at stake. Let us preach with a holy fear and a sincere desperation!"<sup>12</sup>

If we believe this, we stand with the apostles and the primitive church in affirming and resting in the reality of the present sovereign reign of Christ over his kingdom. "When the church was asked not to preach in the name of Christ, they concluded that even though the authorities were able temporarily to show their power, ultimately they would have to bow to the will of God (Acts 4:25-28). Far too many people are so afraid of present threats that they ignore eternal threats. But we must show the world that the only one we ought to fear is the One who has the keys to eternity (Luke 12:4). We must proclaim the sovereign reign of Christ."<sup>13</sup>

Meuser summarizes Luther's position with these words,

When God speaks, things can never be the same again. God's word arrests the hearer, touches, condemns, offers, draws, and appeals. None can listen in cool detachment or stay out on the perimeter in a neutral stance. We cannot go out in the same relationship to God as when we can in. If we remain neutral, we have turned our backs on God; the devil has won at least that skirmish. When the word about Christ is preached, God has spoken and one answers yes or no. There is no other alternative.

God speaks! Christ alone is proclaimed! The sermon is a battle ground on which God and Satan contend for the hearts of the people! How will we approach the task of preaching if we really believe this? How much study, care, effort, and prayer will we want to put into it? It is no wonder that Luther called preaching the highest calling of all.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching, Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 53.

<sup>13</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, 116.

<sup>14</sup> Meuser, *Luther, The Preacher*, 26. Luther was not alone among the Reformers in his high opinion of preaching. The Reformers as a rule agreed on a high view of preaching as the first chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession states: The preaching of the word of god is the word of god. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any

There is another aspect to the spiritual warfare that takes place in preaching. Both the preacher and the hearer must learn to fear and worship God first and by doing so enter the second phase of personal spiritual warfare: the renunciation of idols. We are naïve to think that spiritual warfare takes place only in the unseen realm against powers and principalities of the air, devils, demons, and evil spirits. The greatest battle for the supremacy of God in our preaching and our listeners' hearing is in the identification and renunciation of the idols who vie for and own the affections that belong to God alone. Harder to identify than the blatant bluster and blasphemy of the demons we find in the New Testament are the demons and idols we serve and keep hidden in our own hearts. They are harder to identify as idols and enemies because we have made them ourselves, nurtured them, and loved them. Calvin has famously said that man's nature so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols.<sup>15</sup>

These idols, however, must be identified so that they may be renounced and banished, supplanted, unseated, dethroned. This is an issue that has perpetually been at the forefront of God's dealings with His people. No reader of the Scriptures can miss this fact. What we tend to miss is that in our world, in our pews, and in our hearts, God is still calling his people to worship him alone and break free of the strangle hold of our idols. Consider this, written in 1877,

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other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good. <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm> (accessed April 4, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) 1.11.8.

We shall never understand the spiritual movements of our own or any other generation, unless we see that God's controversy with idols and idolatries is the main controversy of the world and stir ourselves to destroy the idols of the flesh and of the mind which stand between us and the light of truth, we are walking in a vain show, and 'Babel' is written over our life.<sup>16</sup>

We are quick to admit that idols are not only graven images and the desires of the flesh. We need to learn to be just as quick to identify the idols of the heart and of the mind. Idols can be anything evil, yes, and good, yes. The idols we serve are everything we allow to usurp the position that only God is entitled to in our affections. At any point which we trust or depend on anything other than the all-sufficient God, we are idolaters. If this does not cause us to stop and take notice, perhaps the realization that all idolatry in the Scripture is categorized as spiritual adultery will (James 4:4). Idolatry and spiritual adultery exist in every age, wherever human hearts exist and we must enter the lists against the paramours of our hearts, if we are going to preach faithfully in the Age of Mission.

As preachers we need to engage ourselves personally in this battle for the purposes of becoming free, so that our hearers might also be freed. We are helped in the battle when we realize that our words, even our preaching words, shout from the overflow of our hearts. The Spirit-led preacher will want spirit-infused words to reach the listener, not advertisements of an adulterous heart.

Zack Eswine tells us that it is because of idols and what he calls "idol noise" that we are not able to preach as effectively as we would wish. He differentiates between idol things and idol thoughts. Idol things we recognize. Idol thoughts are

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<sup>16</sup> J. Baldwin Brown, "Is the Pulpit Losing Its Power?," *The Living Age* 133 (1877): 306, quoted by Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with our Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 218.

the “misuse of mental visuals that fill a person. This includes our thoughts, dreams, and memories. When one uses [these] to [try to] make life work without God, imagination has become idolatrous.”<sup>17</sup> This is important since we often look for more effective, relevant, and practical ways to communicate. We want preaching success so that people can be helped along the path toward God. We even seek to become more effective in order to bring God more glory. We attend seminars and read books and study methods. One book tells us “our efforts have to be effective.... What if we can discover and master tools that will help us be more effective with our study, our sermon, and our skill in delivery? A commitment to excellence means that we desire effectiveness and not only effort.”<sup>18</sup> What we don’t see is that the issue isn’t effectiveness from a this-worldly perspective but an ongoing struggle against heart

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<sup>17</sup>Eswine, *Preaching in A post-Everything World*, 219

<sup>18</sup> Consider this jacket blurb from Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publ. 2003) “Preachers are under the biblical mandate to preach with conviction, passion, and in a way that the Word of God engages the audience and grips their hearts. Hershael W. York and Bert Decker have the experience and methodology to help you do that. *Preaching with Bold Assurance* will help you bring the proven principles of the Bold Assurance concept to your pulpit, giving you a practical tool to help you use your mind, mouth, and being to communicate effectively. You will learn tools for powerful and effective communication based on biblical truth and *proved concepts from the business world so you can preach boldly and skillfully* (emphasis mine) by understanding how God uses you as a communicator—His mouthpiece proclaiming His Message to the world.” There is a sad irony in this blurb since the authors seem to realize that the issue for effective preaching lies in understanding the real nature of the human heart. For example they write on page 6, “The needs of people have not changed since the Bible was completed. They are still born into a sinful world, separated from God, in need of salvation. They still struggle with ‘the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does,’ (1 John 2:16 NIV)—which are the same temptations the Eve faced in the Garden of Eden when she ‘saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasant to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom’ (Gen 3:6). Thousands of years later, our temptations and struggles may take on a different form, but at their core they are still the same struggles as those presented in scripture.” Arturo Azurdia sees the emphasis on technique in the context of the tendency or temptation to diminish or downplay the role of the Holy Spirit on preaching. He writes: “Sadly today it would appear that for a great many [the]... dimension [of the Holy Spirit in]...preaching is altogether ignored. Though studies on the subject of preaching proliferate, right techniques are promoted as the guarantee of effectiveness while dependence on the Holy Spirit is given token consideration, if mentioned at all. A cursory view of contemporary homiletic literature quickly establishes this analysis.... However apart from the quickening power of the Holy Spirit in the act of proclamation, even the best and most essential technique falls miserably short of transforming those to whom we preach.” Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, A Mentor Imprint, 1998), 12.

issues. The problem is most often not poor communication, ineffective methods, poor contextualization, or poor language choice. If this were true we could fault the Prince of Preachers,<sup>19</sup> our Lord Jesus, with poor preaching skills, since his message was mostly resisted and he himself was ultimately rejected. “Human resistance was due neither to Jesus’ lack of contextualization nor to his failure to use the communication media of his day. Jesus was resisted by an abiding irreverence lingering like roaches within the walls of the human heart.”<sup>20</sup> When the preacher understands that the battle is against idols and adulterous hearts he will be freed from the notion that his lack of success is due to a lack of clarity. It is not merely a problem of language and culture unless it is that the language of heaven is not heard by the zealously religious in his day. He was rejected by those with self-righteously hardened hearts. It was only those who heard true freedom and whose hearts were opened by the Spirit who heard and accept the message of the new culture Jesus offered.<sup>21</sup>

Preachers and hearers alike need to come humbly to the text and seek to hear it, in spite of the idol noise that even comes from our church context: traditions, human knowledge, education, family connections, doctrinal purity, spiritual gifts, pride, position, fear, greed, and race.<sup>22</sup> These idols are why all preachers are misunderstood and withstood. This is partly what we see in the reaction of the Sanhedrin to Stephen’s preaching in Acts 7. If this holy man, whose sermon is added

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<sup>19</sup> Although this title is often given to Charles Spurgeon, Mike Abendroth rightly grants it to Christ. Mike Abendroth, *Jesus Christ: Prince of Preachers. Learning from the Teaching Ministry of Jesus*, (Leominster, Great Britain: Day One Publications, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 219.

<sup>21</sup> See Luke 15:1-3 as an example of Jesus being rejected by the Religious leaders and accepted by the “sinners.”

<sup>22</sup> This list taken from class lecture notes prepared by Zack Eswine for “Advanced Homiletics and Communicating the Gospel” Covenant Seminary, 2006.

to the inspired text was rejected, “we need not wonder” said John Calvin, “that what we teach goodly well and profitable should be so falsely misconstrued. The Gospel can never be handled so warily and moderately, but that it shall be subject to false accusations. For that very reason we see the gospel corrupted, deformed and torn in pieces with false reports.”<sup>23</sup> When this happens, we are not necessarily to think that it is because of our poor preaching and then repent for that bad preaching. Instead we must see ourselves as warrior-preachers who continue to attack the lies that seek to replace and displace the truth in the hearts of our listeners.<sup>24</sup> We are to defend the treasure that has been entrusted to us against everything that threatens its purity, clarity, and power. Preaching is warfare, and “the Gospel of salvation [is] under the care of warrior-preachers.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> cited in Fernando, *Acts*, 259.

<sup>24</sup> There are several good resources for knowing how to recognize and fight heart idols, among them: Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart, Learning to Long for God Alone*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), Os Guinness and John Seel, editors, *No God But God, Breaking With the Idols of Our Age*, (Chicago: Moody, 1992), Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods, The Empty Promises of Money, Sex and Power, and the Only Hope the Matters*, (New York: Dutton, 2009), David Powlinson, “Idols of the Heart and “Vanity Fair” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, (Vol. 13 No. 2, 1995) 35-50. <http://jamiehart.typepad.com/files/idols-of-the-heart-powlison.pdf> accessed April 10, 2011

<sup>25</sup> William G Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 6-7. Referring to Scottish preaching and the necessity during the Reformation of those preachers “to defend the doctrine of salvation from all that seemed to impair its efficacy...” [These] preachers were still defending a threatened treasure, and therefore they were preachers of the warrior type.... There energies were often concentrated on the one object of defending a threatened gospel, and in the struggle for this it went hard with the more passive and gentle graces of Christianity and while [some] sighed for something calmer, serener, heavenlier...the cause of the Gospel of salvation remained under the guardian care of the warrior-preachers...”

#### APPENDIX 4: HOLY SPIRIT-EMPOWERED, UNCTION

The repeated phrase *filled with the Holy Spirit* in this Book is connected specifically to witness and proclamation. In fact, four times in Acts this phrase is followed by a verbal proclamation (Acts 2: 2-4; 4: 8, 31; 9:17; 13: 8-11). This combination of Spirit filling and verbal proclamation is consistent with Luke's usage in his Gospel (Luke 1:13-15, 39-41, 42-45, 67-79) where prophetic speaking follows Spirit-filling. F. F. Bruce writes that the use of the aorist passive *plestheis pneumatos hagiou* denotes "a special moment of inspiration" for the moment of proclamation.<sup>1</sup> It is only after this "special moment of inspiration" that the preacher is truly preaching. James Boice concurs with this emphasis on witness and testimony writing, that in every case where believers are filled with the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts they "immediately begin to testify verbally about Jesus."<sup>2</sup> Far too much emphasis in recent years has been given to the instances of tongues, healings, and exorcisms as the fruit of the Holy Spirit's filling, resulting in an under-valuing of the importance of the charismatic enabling for verbal witness. There is in Acts testimony of special spontaneous Spirit-empowerment for the purpose of effective proclamation.<sup>3</sup> This special empowering moment of inspiration and spontaneous filling of the Holy Spirit for witness has been referred to as unction or anointing. Both of these terms can cause confusion or be misused.

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<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 99.

<sup>2</sup> James Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997) 42.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Merida, Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching, Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 55.



In the first case, the confusion arises from the oddness or unfamiliarity of the word *unction*. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones described unction as “the Holy Spirit falling upon the preacher in a special manner.... It is God giving power, and enabling, through the Spirit, to the preacher in order that he may do this work in a manner that lifts it up beyond the efforts and endeavors of man...and [he] becomes the channel through whom the Spirit works.”<sup>4</sup> Drawing from the lecture notes of Archibald Alexander writing more than a century before Lloyd-Jones, said that

Unction is that facility of speech a man may experience in the act of preaching when the Holy Spirit empowers the message beyond the ordinary effect typically produced. On such occasions the Word of God comes ‘in demonstration of the Spirit and of power’ (1 Co 2:4). Previous generations of Christians used the word unction to describe what happens when the glory and presence of God comes down upon a congregation during the preaching. Those in attendance feel a new and heightened degree of God’s presence. The glories of the New Covenant are felt with fresh power. The preacher’s words come with power and fluency, carry the hearers with them, producing a heartfelt, obedient response.<sup>5</sup>

Though this term was once used with familiarity, it is hardly ever heard today. Zack Eswine tells of polling a class of seminarians asking if they knew what unction is. Of the thirty-three students asked, only three could answer knowingly.<sup>6</sup> It is a word, however that ought to be known, and a power that ought to be sought if we are going to preach like the apostles in our own age of mission.

In the second anointing, confusion comes from the over-use and even misuse of the word. In the Old Testament anointing was not only used to describe verbal empowerment but also as a designation for those men set aside for one of the three

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<sup>4</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 305.

<sup>5</sup> James M. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching. Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 115.

<sup>6</sup> Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World. Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with our Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 245.

charismatic offices of priest, prophet, and king. Oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit was used to publically and visually mark a man as one set apart from the general population for one of these specific roles. Each of the offices is understood as a type of the ultimate Messianic office fulfilled uniquely by Jesus Christ. A particular difference between the Old Testament anointing and the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts is that Old Testament anointing was imparted by human hands. Of the eight occurrences of someone being filled with the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts, only in Luke 9:17 is there the laying on of hands prior to the filling of the Holy Spirit. In the other seven cases it is a spontaneous and immediate action of God upon the individual.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in the era of the modern Pentecostal movement, anointing is used to describe both the one who teaches and the material taught. The term can also refer to music, songs, and worship services. For this reason in this discussion we will revert to the older and less familiar term. Unction will be used to describe the necessary empowerment of the preaching in favor of anointing.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Iain Murray, *Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), quotes Martyn Lloyd-Jones as saying, "I do not know of a single instance among such men where they received the blessing [i.e. filling of the Holy Spirit] as the result of the laying on of hands of someone else; [other than the Apostles in Acts 8:17] not a single one." Lloyd-Jones was not speaking as an opponent or skeptic of the nascent Charismatic movement but rather as a careful and hopeful observer. His concern, according to Iain Murray, was that the focus of the movement would be taken away from the Divine initiative and given to human instrumentality. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones offers the additional terms in *Preaching and Preachers*, 308: "accession of power," "effusion of power," and "baptism of the Holy Spirit." This last term is less helpful since there are those on the one hand who equate the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the work of regeneration and there are others who equate it with a secondly equally unique event that results in either speaking in tongues, or even entire sanctification. Lloyd-Jones shows the differentiation of his usage in this sentence: "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not regeneration—the apostles were already regenerate—and it is not given primarily to promote sanctification; it is a baptism of power, or a baptism, of fire to enable one to witness. The old preachers used to make a great deal of this. They would ask about a man, 'Has he received his baptism of fire?' That was the great question. It is not regeneration or sanctification; this is power, power to witness." For the view that the Baptism is to be understood as simultaneous with regeneration see John R.W. Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1964). James Boice also takes this view in James Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997) 42. Lloyd Jones' views and defense of his use of baptism of the Holy Spirit are found in Iain Murray, *Lloyd-Jones Messenger*

That this unction is not a one-time event is seen in the repeated use of “filled with the Holy Spirit.” It seems that this special enabling moment of inspiration comes repeatedly, “not something once for all; it can be repeated, and repeated many, many times.”<sup>9</sup> The apostolic preaching of Acts and also of the rest of the New Testament is preaching that comes in a demonstration of power. It is not human wisdom, fancy talk, rhetorical flourish, or emotional manipulation (I Cor. 2:3-5). It is something altogether different. It is a grant of power from God to enable effective and saving witness.<sup>10</sup> For contemporary preaching to truly be Biblical preaching it must come in this same power. Here of course is a problem. We are not the apostles. There is another problem. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Sovereignly free God gives to whom he will when he will. For this reason unction was also called a visitation of God by the Puritans.<sup>11</sup> We do not see the apostles expressing concern about not having this unction, these effusions. We do not see them working to manufacture the presence or power of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, in the one instance where the power of the Holy Spirit is sought by artificial means, the suppliant, Simon Magus, is cursed for his efforts (Acts 8: 18-25).<sup>12</sup> On the other

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of Grace, 127-164, and fully developed in sermon form in Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Baptism and Gifts of the Spirit*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 308.

<sup>10</sup> Boice, *Acts*, “So if you ask whether a person is ‘Spirit-filled,’ the only way to answer the question is by determining whether or not he or she speaks often and effectively about Jesus. It is not by whether he or she speak in an unintelligible tongue or does miracles. The question is, Does he or she testify to Jesus Christ, and does God bless that testimony in the conversion of men and women?” 42. Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, adds that “Spirit-empowered preaching will bring conviction of sin and repentance (Acts 2:37-41). While some sermons may stir up emotion, true repentance that leads to fruitfulness and faithfulness is a work of the Spirit. Genuine converts are produced by the Spirit and the Word. (1 Pet 1:123-25).... Spirit-empowered preaching will be evidenced in the Character of Christ on the preacher (Gal 5:22-23) and in his boldness in preaching the gospel. (Eph 6:18-20; Acts 4).” 56-57.

<sup>11</sup> Cotton Mather, quoted in Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 318.

<sup>12</sup> J. B. Phillips translates Acts 8:20 “to hell with you and your money” and offers this explanatory note: “These words are exactly what the Greek means. It is a pity that their real meaning is obscured

hand, the paucity of power in contemporary preaching should raise our concern enough to ask, what is necessary for us to do to receive this power? How can I receive the unction?

Before we answer the question of how? we will take a short detour and ask “Why not?” Why does God not grace a preacher’s work with this effusion? A beginning place for the answer to “why not?” is found in Charles Bridges, author of *The Christian Ministry, With an Inquiry into the Causes of its Inefficiency*.<sup>13</sup> Bridges lists several reasons why a Pastor’s ministry may have a “want of success.” One of these is what he names “the withholding of Divine Influence.” Bridges holds that there will be no true work of God, no ministerial success, no souls drawn to the Savior and redeemed without the necessary attending work of the Holy Spirit. He does not use the terms unction, anointing, baptism, or filling of the Holy Spirit, but he does describe the empowerment of this Divine influence in the same way as those authors who do use them. This Divine influence is necessary in the work of Gospel proclamation because of the natural condition of the man “dead in trespasses and sins with his understanding darkened and at enmity with God. The stony heart of man can is insensitive to the blessing of the truth even under its most attractive form.”<sup>14</sup>

Bridges is far more bold on this point than other writers when he says that Scripture testifies to the necessity of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit by contrasting for us the ministry of Christ in his preaching. Christ himself tells us that

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by modern slang usage.” J. B. Phillips, *The Young Church in Action, A translation of the Acts of the Apostles*, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1954), 22.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry, With an Inquiry into the Causes of its Inefficiency*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967 [first published 1830]).

<sup>14</sup> Bridges gives several additional reasons for ministerial inefficiency including: the natural state of the minister’s heart, Satanic Power, the locale of the ministry, and the lack of a true call to ministry in the preacher. I am intentionally limiting his material to the “want of Divine Influence” for the present discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching.

no one comes to him unless divinely drawn (John 6:44, 65). Bridges asserts the relative lack of success in the preaching ministry of Jesus during his Incarnation compared to the stunning results to the Apostles at and following Pentecost is due to the lack of divine influence in the former case and the effusion of His power and presence in the case of the apostles. “Though his doctrine was from God—though his character was perfect—and though daily miracles attended his mission, yet little appears to have been done; while Peter, a poor fisherman, endued with the almighty power, becomes the instrument of converting more under a single sermon than probably his Master had throughout his whole ministry. The other Apostles preached both in collective and individual instances, with the same ‘demonstration of the Spirit and power’.”<sup>15</sup>

And why is this divine influence withheld? One of Bridges’ answers is the sovereign purposes of God. This is not the only answer he gives. Even those who hold to a high view of the sovereignty of God

...must not slumber in acquiescence without self-inquiry. Do we fervently seek and cherish this influence? Do we actively ‘stir up the gift of God which is within us?’ Above all does our pulpit set out the full exhibition of our Divine Master, which alone commands this heavenly blessing? The encouragement of prayer and faith are always the same. God is indeed absolutely sovereign in the distribution of his blessing; but by his command to seek, he has pledged himself, that we shall not seek in vain. having freely promised, he will faithfully perform. Let all means be used in diligence, but in dependence—in self-denial, but in self-renunciation. Let not ministers be unduly exalted among their people. We are only instruments ‘*by whom* they believe,’ and a dependence on our labour may provoke the grand Agent—who ‘giveth not his glory to another’—to wither the most effective ministry, that these idolaters may ‘know that we are but men.’<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 81.

The answer to “how?” comes from a cross-Atlantic contemporary of Charles Bridges. The Princetonian Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) is very helpful to us in our inquiry. Alexander was professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology when Princeton Seminary was in its early years. Not only did he help design and mold the curriculum of the school but also taught required classes of pastoral theology and homiletics. It is from his class lecture notes that James Garretson has given us a treasure trove of practical piety. From Garretson’s work we expand our understanding of unction in preaching.

In Alexander’s day there were few homiletics texts available. There were several well-known texts on rhetoric and oratory. One of these, Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, published in 1783,<sup>17</sup> described unction from a purely academic and rhetorical perspective. Blair encouraged preachers to consider the seriousness of their subject and its importance to the listener, calling for them to combine what he called Gravity and Warmth in pulpit discourse. These two together “form that character of preaching which the French call *Unction*: the affecting penetration, interesting manner, flowing from a strong sensibility of heart in the Preacher to the importance of those truths which he delivers, and an earnest desire that they may make full impression on the hearts of his Hearers.”<sup>18</sup> Archibald Alexander exploited this definition and added specifically Biblical concepts.

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<sup>17</sup> found at

[http://books.google.com/books?id=AydbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=hugh+blair+belles+lettres&source=bl&ots=EwSbo6Zjnz&sig=FPXfYj9V6jYBzViE5oO5UALScnw&hl=en&ei=tlWwTf-3FaTL0QHEoZWKCQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CD8Q6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=AydbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=hugh+blair+belles+lettres&source=bl&ots=EwSbo6Zjnz&sig=FPXfYj9V6jYBzViE5oO5UALScnw&hl=en&ei=tlWwTf-3FaTL0QHEoZWKCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CD8Q6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q&f=false), (accessed April 4, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, (1783) 2:107, quoted by James M. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching. Archibald Alexander and the Christian Ministry*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 115.

But there is one qualification which such a man will want, that solemnity which arises from the fear of God; and that affectionate manner, termed *unction* which arises from a deep feeling of the truth, and importance and excellence of what he utters, from the Word of God. This qualification which is nothing else but piety in lively exercise is of the utmost importance to good and useful preaching. Possessed of this a preacher may be defective in vigour (*sic*) of intellect, in liveliness and imagination, of a good visor [appearance], and gracious address, and yet be an edifying preacher. But without it he may be a good preacher, a splendid orator and an impressive declaimer, but there will be an essential defect in his sermons, the right spirit will be wanting. And while the multitude may be pleased, and the refined gratified, the hearers will not be edified, nor sinners converted.<sup>19</sup>

Alexander taught his students that there are both human and divine elements in acquiring this unction. From the human side there must be both desiring and seeking. The preacher seeks the power of God and opens the door to receiving this unction by being aware of these seven prerequisites

- 1) First and foremost is the necessity of a regenerated heart. While this may seem to go without saying, it cannot go without saying. Books talking about preaching today seem to assume the salvation and assurance of the preacher. There is not true preaching of the Good News from a heart that has not experienced its power. Archibald Alexander told students that it would “be an evident incongruity in anyone undertaking to guide others in the way in which he has never traveled.” Theology and theory are not sufficient and cannot “replace the need for a man to be converted...ministers must have personal experience of the power of the truth in their lives.”<sup>20</sup> Not only is the preacher in need of a new heart, but a constantly renewed heart. The pastor-preacher must be a person of consecration and personal holiness. Unction comes from a combination of godly character and the

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<sup>19</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 56-57.

blessing of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works through human means, in this case redeemed men who have surrendered their lives to Christ's purposes for them."<sup>21</sup>

- 2) The preacher is called to be dedicated to getting a better sense and larger view of God and the Gospel. "Endeavor to get your hearts affected with the truths which you are to deliver to others." Here is why we start our thinking about preaching by being God-centered and Christ-exalting. Alexander told his students at Princeton that the preacher needs to fill his thoughts with things above,

where Christ is seated in his heavenly glory. Look to Christ. Look to His Word. Look to what you have been given. Glory in it. Meditate upon it. Fill you soul with thoughts of Christ and his excellency. Let your hearts be moved by these things and go forth to preach in the triumph of the cross...these are the wellspring from which come unction and empowerment of the minister's words in the activity of preaching.<sup>22</sup>

- 3) One way of getting this affecting view of God out of our own hearts and into the hearts of our listeners is the discipline of preaching the truth to our own hearts first. It is futile for us to seek to have God affect our listeners when we have not ourselves been affected. For this reason Alexander recommended daily devotional reading of the Scriptures—not only for the preparation of sermons but reading for one's own soul.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the Bible, he also recommendation reading

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<sup>21</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 79.

<sup>22</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 116.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 [first published 1846]), 280, gives valuable advice to all of us regarding our intake of Scripture and time with God in his comments on Pro 18:1. "We must walk with God in secret, or the enemy will walk with us, and our souls will die... Deal much in secrecy, if thou wouldst know 'the secret of the Lord.' Like thy Divine Master, thou wilt never be less alone than when alone. There is much to be wrought, gained, and enjoyed. Thy moist spiritual knowledge, thy richest experience will be found here. Men who live without retirement may be fluent talkers, and accurate preachers. But nothing comes as from a broken and contrite heart. The want of unction paralyses all spiritual impression. No intelligent, self-observant Christian but feels the immense moment of combining holy solitude with active life, as the nourishment of his faith, and with it of every Christian grace."



“spiritual, practical, searching, and pungent treatises or sermons [especially Puritans].”<sup>24</sup>

- 4) The preacher must “Cultivate habitually a sense of [his] own insufficiency—that much depends on the blessing of God.”<sup>25</sup> Formal education easily leads to pride and God will not, cannot use a proud preacher. “Self-denial and deep humility are among the most essential requisites for preaching.”<sup>26</sup> This humility is what it means to be poor in spirit for the preacher. The fruit of this humility is being filled with the spirit and power.<sup>27</sup> Garretson says that Alexander frequently “reminded the students to recognize their insufficiency and remember to pray for the blessing of God to rest on their labours (*sic*). To forget this was to forget one’s source of strength.”<sup>28</sup>
- 5) Prayer is necessary for the continued sense of insufficiency for the task. The prayer is that the preacher’s heart will be kept sensitive to the need for increased humility. It is only with a right heart before God that our words to our people may be rightly empowered. This prayer to know one’s own heart is imperative, since we are told that it both deceitful<sup>29</sup> and the very wellspring of our lives (see

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<sup>24</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 118.

<sup>27</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 235.

<sup>28</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 93 “This is, in part, why he felt written sermons could be dangerous to a preacher’s calling; they may tend to forgetfulness of ‘their lively sense of his dependence on Divine aid which he preach ought to feel.’”

<sup>29</sup> Charles Bridges writes with humble insight regarding the deceptiveness of the human heart and our propensity to self-deception on Proverbs 21:2. “Let me be thankful for the repetition of this weighty Proverb; most valuable for the close probing of my heart, and the testing of the vital spirituality of my profession [as a Christian]. So ‘deceitful is the heart above all things’ (Jer. 17:9), that it deceives, not others only, but—what even Satan never does—itself. Every intelligent Christian bears painful witness to this self-deception. How differently do we judge of the same action in others, and in ourselves! Often do we palliate, if not justify, in ourselves the very habits, which we condemn in others. Never therefore is the prayer out of season—‘Search me, O God; know me. try me; shew me to myself’ (Ps. 139:23). There are no persons in the world about whom we make so many mistakes as

Prov. 4:23). Prayer is made during the preparation and study,<sup>30</sup> immediately prior to preaching, in the act of preaching, and again at the end of the sermon.<sup>31</sup>

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ourselves. But Oh! to be approved of God in the heart, and in sincerity, is no common mercy! Hid as the self-deluding professor is from himself, *his way is right in his own eyes*. But is it right in God's eyes? *The Lord pondereth the heart*. Solemn and awakening recollection! He thoroughly reads every heart. And what defilement does he see in those *ways of a man* that are most right *in his own eyes*! But the all-searching eye discovered pride, covetousness, disobedient rejection of his God.... Little did the self-complacent ruler [Saul not waiting for Samuel, not obeying God] suspect the spiritual pride, false confidence, and worldliness, which this heart-searching brought to view. And how much base alloy is hidden even in a sound-hearted profession! The disciples covered their own spirit under the pretence of vehement zeal for their Master (Luke 9:54). *The Lord pondereth the heart*. He 'weigheth the spirits' (Prov. 16:2); proving exactly what is of himself, and what is of a baser kind; what, and how much, there is of God, what of man. The principles of the heart lie deep. The work may be good in itself. But what are the ends?... Self-distrust is therefore the wisdom of true godliness (Prov. 28:26); daily, hourly, trembling in ourselves; yet boldly grounding our confidence in God! But for the covering of the High Priest how could we stand for one moment under the piercing eye of our judge? Did our dearest earthly friend know what was passing in our thoughts at any one hour, could he ever deem us worthy of confidence? Must not his heart revolt from contact with such vileness? Yet does out gracious *Lord*, while *pondering our hearts*, and privy to all their hidden corruption, forgive, accept, yea—rejoice in us as his people."

<sup>30</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 93, says that Alexander used the motto "To have prayed well is to have studied well."

<sup>31</sup> Charles Spurgeon, "The Preacher's Private Prayer," *Lectures to my Students*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008, [One volume reprint of three volumes first published 1875-1894]), Spurgeon Told his students that a part of the preacher's prayer was prayer "*After the Sermon*, how would a conscientious preacher give vent to his feelings and find solace for his soul if access to the mercy-seat were denied him? Elevated to the highest pitch of excitement, how can we relieve our souls but in importunate pleadings. Or depressed by a fear of failure, how shall we be comforted but in moaning our out complaint before our God. How often have some of us tossed to and fro upon our couch half the night because of conscious shortcomings in our testimony! How frequently have we longed to rush back to the pulpit to say over again more vehemently, what we have uttered in so cold a manner! Where could we find rest for our souls but in confessions of sin, and passionate entreaty that our infirmity or folly might in no way hinder the Spirit of God! It is not possible in a public assembly to pour out all our heart's love to our flock.... only in private prayer can he draw up the sluices and bid them flow forth. If we cannot prevail with men for God, we will, at least prevail with God for men. We cannot save them, or even persuade them to be saved, but we can at least bewail their madness and entreat the interference of the Lord.... There is a distinct connection between importunate agonizing and true success, even as between the travail and the birth, the sowing in tears and reaping in joy.... When we have done with preaching we shall not, if we are true ministers of God, have done with praying, because the whole church, will many tongues will be crying in the language of the Macedonian, 'Come over and help us'.... The minister who does not pray over his work must surely be a vain and conceited man. He acts as if he thought himself sufficient of himself, and therefore needed not to appeal to God. Yet what a baseless pride to conceive that our preaching can ever be in itself so powerful that it can turn men from their sins, and bring them to God without the working of the Holy Ghost. If we are truly humble-minded we shall not venture down to the fight until the Lord of Hosts has clothed us with all power, and said to us, 'Go in this thy might.' The preacher who neglects to pray much must be very careless about his ministry. He cannot have comprehended his calling. He cannot have computed the value of a soul, or estimated the meaning of eternity. He must be a mere official... or a detestable hypocrite who loves the praise of men, and cares not for the praise of God. He will surely become a mere superficial talker, best approved where grace is least valued and vain show most admired. He cannot be one of those who plough deep and reap abundant harvests. He is a mere loiterer, not a labourer. As a preacher he has a name to live and is dead. He limps in this life like

Alexander recommended enlisting the congregation in prayer as well—for the preacher and for themselves. One of Alexander's well-known successors at Princeton, B. B. Warfield, combined the necessity of learning about God with communion with God shown in this passage quoted by Fred Zaspel:

Sometimes it is said that ten minutes on your knees will give you a truer, deeper, more operative sense of God than ten hours over your books. 'What!' is the appropriate response, 'than ten hours over your books, on your knees?' Why should you turn from your books in order to turn to God? If learning and devotion are as antagonistic as that, then the intellectual life is in itself accursed, and there can be no question of a religious life for a student, even of theology. The mere fact that he is a student hinders him...there can be no 'either—or' here, either a student or a man of God. You must be both.<sup>32</sup>

Prayer is not merely a duty or a magic elixir to bend the will of God to ours. There must be in the preacher who desires the unction of the Holy Spirit a love of communion with God. Added to this love of being with God is a love for God that spills over into a desire to have the hearer come to know the compelling beauty of his character and his love for them, in spite of their own unwillingness to know him. One can feel the passion with which Alexander sought to infect his students when he writes

Be much concerned about the success of your ministry! Cry mightily to God, that He would follow your labours (*sic*) with His blessing, and give you precious souls for your hire, and as seals of your mission. Get your mind deeply affected with the miserable condition of those to whom you are sent to call to repentance. Consider that their salvation may depend on your fidelity. Bear them on your heart night and day in your prayers. Perhaps no instance

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the lame man in Proverbs , whose legs were not equal, for his praying is shorter than his preaching." 4-49.

<sup>32</sup> Fred Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 569. Charles Spurgeon comes at this from an opposite tack. "I trust I do not address a single man who has fallen into the slovenly habit of going to his work without first communing with his Master; for such an unhappy person, being out of touch with his Lord, will exercise an injurious influence over the rest of the household making them idle, or indifferent, or dissatisfied, or dispirited." *An All-Round Ministry*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960, reprint edition 2000 [first edition published 1900]), 260.

can be found of a very successful preacher who was not also endued with a devotional spirit, and the ministry of men truly fervent in prayer is seldom altogether barren. To study your sermon well is highly important; but to pray with sufficient earnestness and importunity is [most] important.”<sup>33</sup>

Alexander encouraged his students not to yield to discouragement. Every pastor knows not only are the fields white with harvest; the fields are also filled with stones and often thorns. Perseverance is fighting the good fight and remembering that the fight is a good fight. More than this, the work and the battle is not ours, it is the Lord’s. “[W]e must persevere in good work. Never grow weary in well doing. We must put our hand to the plow; we must not look back. We are soldiers for life. God’s acceptance is, after all, the most important thing. Be faithful in preparing for your own account unto God, in order that you may render it with joy and not with grief.”<sup>34</sup> We persevere expecting success. “Sow your seed,” said Alexander, and leave the watering, growing and harvesting to God. In all of this, in times of fruitfulness and in times of barrenness, the preacher, seeking the power and unction of God, will hold onto the promises of God. God’s work will be done, his word will prevail, his Church will advance, the Kingdom will be fully and completely established. We are but a cog in a mighty piece of machinery moving through history. Hold on!

There is one additional aspect in the seeking and attaining of *unction* that is not included in Garretson’s study of Archibald Alexander which speaks out of the experience of this writer. Tony Merida admits that the Holy Spirit is sovereign and free, but that there are commonalities “that appear to be present in preachers who

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<sup>33</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 120.

<sup>34</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 121.

consistently preach with spiritual power.”<sup>35</sup> He lists seven disciplines: dependency/humility, personal holiness, prayer for a work of God, prayer for illumination, study, Christ-centeredness, and congregational involvement. It is the seventh that is easily overlooked. Merida tells us that we must work hard not only on our knees, at our desks, and in the pulpit, but we must work hard among the people we are called to serve to cultivate congregational unity. The Spirit of God is the bond of peace. We are called each one individually and together to have an eagerness for the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). One should shudder and weep to think how often we have quenched the effusion of the power of God when we nurture unloving attitudes and “commonly tolerated sins like gossip, slander, evil speaking, and jealousy in the body.” Merida implores pastors to let the people in their charge know that it is not only the pastor who is responsible for the withholding and hindrance of the power of God, but they, too, play a role through their lifestyles and relationships.<sup>36</sup>

Like Archibald Alexander, we must be convinced of the utter necessity of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us and our preaching if it is to be powerful and effectual.<sup>37</sup> We need to see and feel this necessity each time we read the phrase “and

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<sup>35</sup> Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 57

<sup>36</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 59. See also Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry, With an Inquiry into the Causes of its Inefficiency*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967 [first published 1830]), 72-173.

<sup>37</sup> One of Archibald Alexander’s students, Theodore L. Cuyler (1822-1909), wrote in his autobiography, *Reflections of a Long Life*, (New York, Baker & Taylor, 1902), quoted in “Advice for Young Preachers,” *The Banner of Truth* 584 (2012): 22-30, It is not easy to define what that subtle something is which we call pulpit magnetism. As near as I can come to a definition I would say it is the quality of faculty that arouses the attention and strengthens the interest of his auditors and which, when aided by the Holy Spirit, produces conviction in their minds by the truth that is in Jesus. The heart in the speaker’s voice sends that voice into the hearts of his hearers. It is an undoubted fact that pulpit fervour (*sic*) has been a characteristic of almost all the preachers of a soul-winning gospel. The fire was kindled in the pulpit that kindled the pews.... In my own experience I have as often found spiritual result from the discourses partly or mainly written out as from those spoken

they were filled with the Holy Spirit.” Surely this is not something for the former days only. We can and should know and pay attention to technique, but in doing so we should never lose sight that “only God can impart the power needed to bring the preached Word home to the hearts and consciences of one’s hearers. It was this anointing of the Spirit that Alexander sought for his preaching.”<sup>38</sup> This sense of dependence on the Holy Spirit should permeate every aspect of our preaching: preparation, delivery, and results. As the heavenly message was often called a burden by the prophets of the Old Testament, the preacher in the Age of Mission should feel the burden of seeking the approval of God through the effusion of his anointing power in every sermon. We must never allow technique or methodology<sup>39</sup>

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extemporaneously. While much may depend upon the condition in the congregation and much aid may be drawn from the intercessory prayers of our people, *the main thing is to have a baptism of fire in our own hearts* Sometimes a sermon may produce but little impression, yet the same sermon at another time and place may deeply move an audience, and yield rich spiritual results. Physical condition may have some influence on a minister’s delivery; but the chief element in that eloquence that awakens and converts sinners and strengthens Christians is the *unction of the Holy Spirit*. Our best power is the power from on high.” (Emphasis in original). 27-28.

<sup>38</sup> Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 236.

<sup>39</sup> It is disconcerting to read in Homiletics texts statements such as this challenge from Hershel W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003) 6. “Our efforts have to be effective.... What if we can discover and master tools that will help us be more effective with our study, our sermon, and our skill in delivery? A commitment to excellence means that we desire effectiveness and not only effort” and Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994) “Most Pastors are committed to good preaching. Few however, are really satisfied with their own sermon preparation or its results. On the one hand, preaching is an academic discipline. It calls for serious study, for expert training. On the other hand, preaching is a spiritual exercise. Its basis is the Word of the living God. It comes with much prayer and *hopefully with the Spirit’s enabling*. Poor preaching, then, reflects badly on the preacher’s scholarship [as well as his spirituality.” (emphasis mine) 6. The remainder of this book teaches these 12 essential skills as though effective preaching could possible take place without the *hopeful enabling of the Holy Spirit*. Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching Through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1995), lists “Five Imperatives for Preaching” taken out of II Timothy 4:1-2 “Preach the Word! Be ready! Reprove! Rebuke! Exhort!” He speaks of the necessity of confidence in the unique inspiration of the Word, The need for illumination by the Holy Spirit in Preparation and the goal of life transformation in preaching. But in none of the discussion before he moves into technique does he speak of the *necessity* of the Holy Spirit and power in preaching. It is all “how –to” pages 1-10. This mere nod to the need of the Holy Spirit in the preacher’s task is not an exclusively modern attitude. It is also seen in the older and respected work of Andrew W. Blackwood, *The Preparation of Sermons*, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948) who writes, “We shall assume that the work of preaching affords the most attractive opportunity for the usefulness on earth today and that the sermon constitutes the

to take the place of or diminish this burden. The history of the apostles in the Book of Acts continually reminds us that we should seek it for ourselves.<sup>40</sup>

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chief product of the minister's labors from week to week. We shall also *take for granted* that he seeks and follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer." (italics added) page 20. A much more encouraging (and eternally helpful) is approach is "The Preacher and Consecration" 214-228, in Stephen J. Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, Foreword by Adrian Rogers, (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1998). The Olfords make the point that before Jesus began his earthly ministry sought and received the anointing of the Holy Spirit (promised and prophesied in Isa. 61:1-3) and then write: "The point we make here is that.... As preachers, we likewise *need* this 'sacred anointing.' [which] enables us to *appreciate* the Word of God... and *authenticate* the Work of God. This unction is the safeguard against error [and gives us] the outward clothing with power. 216-217.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander's understanding of the dynamics of spiritual change sheds light on his approach to ministerial instruction. Seminaries provided instruction and professors serve as examples of piety and learning, but only the Spirit of God can prepare and empower a man to preach the Word. Formal instruction in the schools and academics degrees must never become a substitute for God's anointing and commissioning of a man to speak on his behalf. Garretson, *Princeton and Preaching*, 260. Two resources for the past that are valuable for understanding unction in preaching are, Thomas Chalmers, "The Necessity of the Spirit to Give Effect to the Preaching of the Gospel," <http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/church-ministry/preaching/the-necessity-of-the-spirit-to-give-effect-to-the-preaching-of-the-gospel-by-thomas-chalmers/> (accessed April 19, 2011) and E. M. Bounds, "Unction, the Mark of True Gospel Preaching," [http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Books,%20Tracts%20&%20Preaching/Printed%20Books/PTP/ptp-chap\\_15.htm](http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Books,%20Tracts%20&%20Preaching/Printed%20Books/PTP/ptp-chap_15.htm) (Accessed January 23, 2012), For a more contemporary discussion of attaining the unction and power of the Holy Spirit in preaching see Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching, Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 46-60.

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### PERSONAL INFORMATION

**Birth date:** August 14, 1952 San Antonio, TX  
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**Interests:** Family, Reading, Hiking, Travel, Cooking, Bicycling, Gardening, Kayaking

### EDUCATION

**Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA**  
D. Min., anticipated 2012, Concentration: Preaching  
Thesis "Biblical Preaching in an Age of Mission"

**Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA**  
M.Div., May 1989, *Cum Laude*

**North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL**  
Degree Preparation/Denominational Orientation, 1988-1989

**Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA**  
M.A.T.S., May 1986, (*Magna Cum Laude*) **Concentration:** Church History/Theology

**John Brown University, Siloam Springs, AR**  
B.A., Radio and TV Production, December 1977

### EMPLOYMENT

WellSpring Church, Springfield, MA (2008-present) **Teaching Elder**

Evangelical Covenant Church, Springfield, MA (1990 – 2007) **Senior Pastor**

Evangelical Covenant Church, Springfield, MA (1989 – 1990) **Associate Pastor**

White Street Baptist Church, East Boston, MA (1988) **Interim Pastor**

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary/Center For Urban Ministerial Education (CUME)  
(1999-Present) **Adjunct Professor**, Church History, Preaching

Forus Communications, Tampa, FL  
WSIV/WOIV-FM, Syracuse, NY (1982-1984) **General Manager**  
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